75TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

COMMONWEAL

A Review of Religion, Politics, and Culture November 19, 1999

The Crisis of Liberal Catholicism

Cardinal Francis George
Peter Steinfels
John Noonan
John McGreevy
E.J. Dionne, Jr.

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The Church & Error

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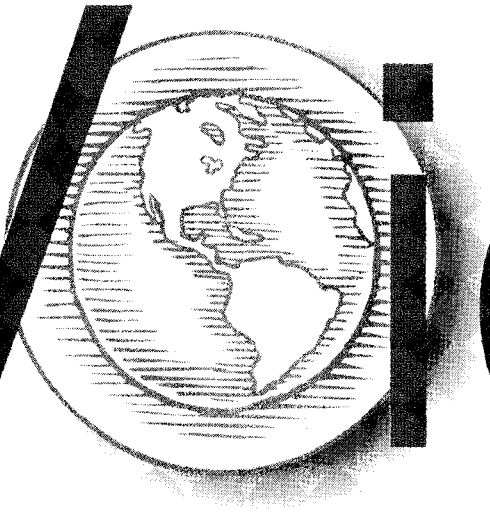

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COMMONWEAL

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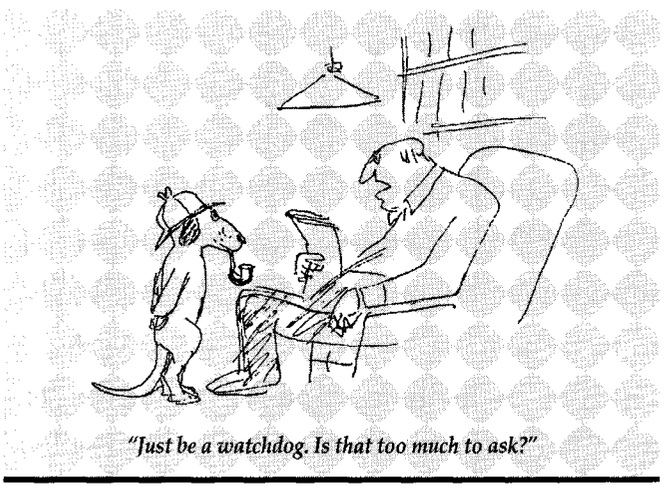

"Just be a watchdog. Is that too much to ask?"

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"Look, I know your little films are being hailed as miracles of wit, montage, casting, cutting, dubbing, and New Wave cinematic technique. But dammit, they're not selling soap!"

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To the Editors

The reviewer's task

As a fellow reviewer of George Weigel's *Witness to Hope* (for *L'Osservatore Romano*), I couldn't but wonder whether Eamon Duffy and I read the same book ["Wojtyla Writ Large, and Long," October 22]. It is, of course, tempting to use the book review format to air one's own views, but how much more helpful to the reader it would have been if a distinguished historian like Duffy had taken Weigel's interpretations of events seriously and told us why he disagrees with them.

MARY ANN GLENDON
Cambridge, Mass.

The writer is Learned Hand Professor of Law at Harvard Law School.

A beautiful book

After reading Eamon Duffy's ungenerous review of *Witness to Hope*, George Weigel's biography of Pope John Paul II, I went back to Duffy's own account of this pontificate in his history of the popes, *Saints and Sinners*, published two years ago. I found that the points covered in the review—for example, the suspension of the constitution of the Jesuit order in 1981, the defense of liberation theology, or the pope's garrulity (Duffy says that Wojtyla saw his role as pope to be an "oracle")—had already been set forth there, often in the same words.

Duffy much preferred the style and policies (except for *Humanae vitae*) of Paul VI to those of John Paul II, whom he considers harshly pessimistic, confrontational, authoritarian, and the like. Hence he sprinkles his review with phrases such as "doomed enterprise," "erodes the reader's trust," "sacrifices credibility," and "conservative" to suggest that the book is partisan and untrustworthy.

But any fair-minded reader will see at once that Weigel has not only gone more deeply into the life and work of this pope than anyone before him, he also tells the story with insight, understanding, learning, literary grace, and, let it be said, sympathy. Few readers will come away unmoved from the sections on Wojtyla's youth, the harsh years under Nazi occupation, his life as a young priest and bishop, or the gripping account of Wojtyla's spiritual turmoil during the month between the death of John Paul I and his own election.

Weigel gives the reader story after story, detail after detail, text after text to support his view that Karol Wojtyla is an extraordinary man, a priest of uncommon depth, a great pope, perhaps one of the greatest, and a historic figure on the world stage. Shouldn't his life be written so that readers can also appreciate his greatness? Let Professor Duffy continue to hold his views. My guess is that most readers will discover that *Witness to Hope* is a beautiful book, thoughtful, informed, carefully researched (and well-indexed), a pleasure to read.

ROBERT LOUIS WILKEN
Charlottesville, Va.

The writer is William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of the History of Christianity at the University of Virginia.

Bright lights, plus shadows

Eamon Duffy's review of George Weigel's biography of Pope John Paul II is masterly. Duffy's generous and well-merited praise of Weigel's major achievement lends credibility to the review's critique.

This long pontificate manifests wonderfully bright lights for which one can only be grateful. Duffy calls attention to the shadows. Especially

(Continued on page 58)

75 COMMONWEAL

1999 marks Commonweal's 75th year of publication.
We invite you to celebrate with us...in New York:

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(see ad, page 9, review, page 55)
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THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION
at Fordham University, Lincoln Center, New York
on Tuesday, November 30, 1999
"On Being a Reluctant Catholic," a talk by Alice McDermott
at 5:15 P.M. in the Law School Auditorium and is free of charge.
Followed by a 75th Anniversary Dinner
at 7:00 P.M. in the President's Dining Room.
The dinner is $1 x 75 years = $75
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Seventy-five years!

Journals of opinion come in all shapes and sizes, and in varying degrees of persuasiveness. Readers pick up some to be consoled and reassured, others to be provoked, and still others to find ammunition for political or ideological battles. And then there is the excitement of encountering a new writer, a genuinely new perspective, or even a good old idea decked out in unexpected but pleasing new attire. Throughout its seventy-five year history, *Commonweal* has, with varying degrees of success, performed all of these services for its readership—plus, we hope, providing that hard-to-define something more that forges a permanent bond between a magazine and its audience. In this, our seventy-fifth anniversary issue, we hope we have given readers a little (in some cases, there's actually quite a lot) of everything above.

It has been the magazine's custom, in marking chronological milestones, to rehearse the rationale and purposes of the enterprise's founders (*see*, "From the Archives" on page 6) and succeeding editors. Since its inception, *Commonweal* has been careful to declare itself "not the organ of any political party, or of any single school of economic or social theory." It has resolutely disclaimed a role as "an authoritative or authorized mouthpiece of the Catholic church." Instead of advancing an ideological program or institutional interest, the magazine has tried to develop an "approach," a way of bringing Catholic convictions, reasoned reflection, and, above all, fair-mindedness in argument to the assessment of the issues of the day. The issues of the day are many. In a manner of speaking, the magazine's subject matter has always stretched from Rome to California, and beyond. And despite disappointment, we haven't given up on either California or Rome (*pace* Richard John Neuhaus, page 16). Simply put, "*The Commonweal* has not backed away from American life and culture, which it hopes to influence," wrote the editors in marking the magazine's twenty-fifth birthday.

The current editors continue to endorse that description of the magazine's purpose and function. An important part of that engagement has been the promotion of human dignity for all and the pursuit of social justice. Even in flush times, that fight is far from won. We also hope this journal expresses some of the good humor, unabashed curiosity, and simple joy in life that any incarnational faith worth its gospel salt should possess in plenty. The publication of fresh, honest writing, whether it is about the movies, a new novel or TV show, or even the small revelatory incidents of everyday life, is one way to testify to that incarnational faith. Ideally, this is a magazine that reaches from the Vatican archives on Pius XII to the Brooklyn Museum to the plight of Albanian Kosovars and to a great many other nooks and crannies.

Much of this hefty anniversary issue is taken up with a familiar quandary. Both Chicago's Cardinal Francis George and former *Commonweal* editor Peter Steinfels analyze the strengths and weaknesses of that venerable hybrid, "liberal" Catholicism. We see the authors' approaches as complementary rather than antagonistic, although there is no disguising a fundamental divergence of views on some aspects of the question.

The ideas that congregate around the often slippery term "liberal Catholicism"

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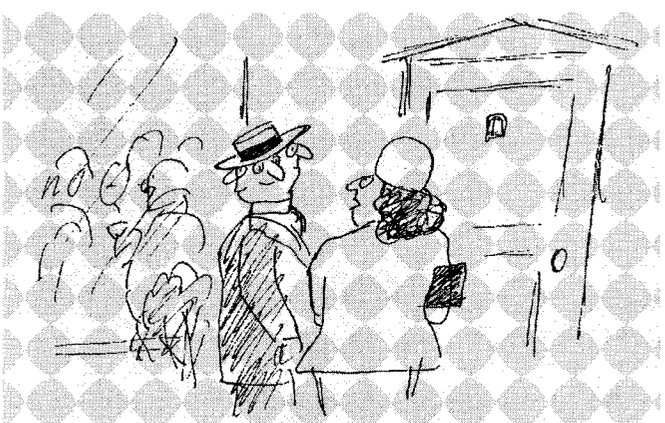
(*see*, John Noonan, page 40) have been a preoccupation of this journal for much of its history. Cardinal George warns that important aspects of liberal culture are inimical to Catholicism and especially to the formation of a distinctive Catholic sensibility and vision. There is a measure of truth in such warnings. But there is also a strain in the cardinal's remarks that strongly suggests Catholicism has already absorbed all that is postive about modernity. That assertion seems less self-evident, at least to us.

Precisely these questions are the subject of philosopher Charles Taylor's new book, *A Catholic Modernity*? (Oxford). Taylor, like George, mounts a devastating critique of modernity's denial of transcendence, and especially of the room such a denial creates for explicitly antihumanistic philosophies, such as eugenics and Social Darwinism. Taylor is also acute in his deconstruction of the philosophy of atomistic individualism that often dominates our political and moral debates. But he is more positive than the cardinal in his valuation of modernity's moral resources, especially liberal culture's regard for individual rights and dedication to human well-being. "My feelings are divided, complex," Taylor confesses, describing how he, as a Catholic intellectual, responds to a modern world that combines high moral aspirations with a disregard bordering on contempt for Catholicism and religious faith.

Taylor reminds us that secular humanism has brought universal human rights to the forefront of the world's moral agenda in a way the church never could. As a consequence, he resists arguments that "condemn or affirm modernity *en bloc*." Moreover, he argues that a church that has rightly, if tardily, embraced the secular humanistic demand for human rights cannot somehow bypass modern culture in now championing those rights. In the final analysis, liberalism's real moral accomplishments justify its equally real moral risks."Better, I would argue," Taylor writes, that Catholics "gradually find our voice from within the achievements of modernity."

That precisely is the task *Commonweal* has been committed to for seventy-five years. There is much work still to be done. As we begin the next quarter of a century, we want to thank the authors, readers, and generous benefactors who have allowed us to keep trying to get that voice right.



"Now remember, you can only carry on four conversations at one time!"

From the archives

Throughout 1999, Commonweal *has been celebrating its 75th anniversary. Here from the first issue, November 13, 1924, is an excerpt from an editorial introducing the magazine to its readers.*

For the difference between *The Commonweal* and other weekly literary reviews designed for general circulation is that the *The Commonweal* will be definitely Christian in its presentation of orthodox religious principles and their application to the subjects that fall within its purview: principles which until now have not, we believe, been expressed in American journalism except through the medium of the official organs of the Catholic church and the various denominations. As a sure background *The Commonweal* will have the continuous, unbroken tradition and teachings of the historic Mother Church.

But it will be in no sense—nor could it possibly assert itself to be—an authoritative or authorized mouth piece of the Catholic church. It will be the independent, personal product of its editors and contributors, who, for the most part, will be laymen. Its pages will be open to writers holding different forms of Christian belief, and in some cases to authors who do not profess any form of Christian faith. Where the opinion of its editors, contributors, and readers differs on subjects yet unsettled by competent authority, it will be an open forum for the discussion of such differences in a spirit of good temper....

It is unquestionably a spiritual, moral, and patriotic duty for thinking people at least to make an effort to apply the conserving and regenerative forces of the fountain head of Christian tradition, experience, and culture to the problems that today all men of good will are seeking to solve. As opposed to the present confused, confusing, and conflicting complex of private opinions and personal impressionism, mirrored in so many influential journals, the editors of *The Commonweal* believe that nothing can do so much for the betterment, the happiness, and the peace of the American people as the influence of the enduring and tested principles of Catholic Christianity. To that high task *The Commonweal* is dedicated.

THE EDITORS

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JOHN GARVEY

'SENSATION' IN BROOKLYN

Art, free speech & tax money

The controversy surrounding the "Sensation" exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum has generated a number of knee-jerk responses. New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani is trying to cut taxes paid to the museum and wants to evict it from the city-owned building. On the other side are those who defend the exhibit and the right of the museum to show anything it likes.

The exhibit seems calculated to offend: statues of little girls with phalluses for noses, the portrait of a child murderer made up of tiny children's handprints, dissected animals, the bust of a man made with his own blood. There was controversy as well over the fact that it is all the collection of one man, and one of the sponsors is the auction house which will represent him when these items are sold. It is now clear that the Brooklyn Museum took money from those who stood to benefit from the success of the exhibit. This is ethically shaky, in the view of many museum officials. What drew the mayor's fire was an assemblage called "The Holy Virgin Mary," by Chris Ofili, which featured elephant dung and small cut-out photos of female genitalia.

Most of our large museums receive at least some tax money, and the Brooklyn Museum controversy raises the question of tax support for the arts. Defenders of the "Sensation" exhibit protest that artists must be free to "push the envelope" (always their vocation) and argue that to pull tax money on the grounds of offensiveness is to inhibit free speech. Opponents say that the artist should indeed remain free to do whatever he or she wants, but artists can't expect people they offend to pick up the tab.

Artists have usually been a pretty craven lot, really. After all, they have to sell their wares, and can't be offensive to anyone who could be of serious help to them. During the Renaissance, artists frequently placed their patrons in pictures of the saints, the patron always looking suitably devout. In our time this sort of obsequiousness continues: Transgressive art tends to transgress in very predictable directions. It is unlikely that something offensive to Judaism or to African-Americans would be considered at all acceptable; few Nazis or KKK members haunt the galleries. Christianity is obviously considered fair game, a safe target. The Brooklyn Museum isn't alone: at New York's Guggenheim there is a series called "Stations of the Cross," consisting of people copulating. At the Whitney there is, again, André Serrano's "Piss Christ." A Torah or Islamic Crescent, given the same treatment, would probably offend more people than this photograph of a crucifix floating in urine. And they would have every right to be offended.

"So, you're a businessman who dabbles in art! Well, I happen to be an artist who dabbles in money!"

Civility and taste (if not reverence, even for beliefs you do not share) should keep curators from this sort of thing. Outrage is an understandable response, and there is not only a right, but even sometimes a duty, to protest against offensive art. We also have to argue against the idea that no art could be too offensive for public display; nor are we obliged to take the pretensions of every artist seriously.

Defenders of the exhibit point out that the impressionists and Stravinsky once outraged an uncomprehending public. It doesn't follow, though, that anything outrageous is art, or that in order not to appear Philistine we should tolerate absolutely anything. If nothing is to be taken so seriously that its violation could cause outrage, nihilism wins.

The taste of curators is one thing. Tax money for the arts is another. If taste can't prevent exhibits like this, you would think a desire for self-preservation would. Even if Mayor Giuliani loses in the courts, the Brooklyn Museum is likely to receive less money next year than in the past, precisely because of this.

I have a hard time making the argument that any tax money should be spent on the arts, in a society where so many people lack basic medical coverage. There are priorities, and healthy children matter more than lavish museums. At the same time, I love to visit galleries and go to museums as often as I can. Though there is healthy private support for many of our greatest museums, this is economically a boom time, and that support may erode. My problem with the mayor's action (which was also opposed by the head of the New York City Council, Peter Vallone, who is a serious Catholic) is that it could cut in other directions.

Not too long ago the Metropolitan Museum of Art—my favorite—

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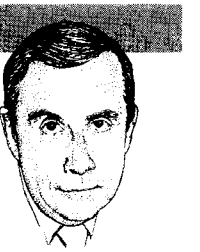
was host to a glorious exhibit of Byzantine art, almost all of it religious. Beautiful icons, chalices, tapestries, mosaics, ivories, and illuminated manuscripts all offered a wonderful picture of Orthodox Christianity. What if an atheist were to object to her tax money being used for this, and brought the matter to court? Some tax money no doubt went, indirectly, to monasteries, which lent much of the art exhibited at the Metropolitan. The whole exhibit served as a kind of celebration of Christian belief, although that was not its main reason for being, in the minds of the curators; it was beautiful by any standard. However, if we are talking about the power to offend, this definitely had the power to offend an atheist, and the city would have been poorer if someone offended by "The Treasures of Byzantium" had been able to keep it from being shown.

My argument here is not that the city would be poorer without "Sensation," which—thanks to the mayor—has drawn huge crowds. Rather, it is this: In a democracy, if we accept taxation at all, we also accept the fact that some of our money will be spent on things we don't like. I don't like my tax money used for the pork Mitch McConnell and Trent Lott have doled out to their districts, or for new weapons systems. We accept a certain amount of slop in a democracy, and at the same time have the right and sometimes the duty to protest how our taxes are being used. If the people who run the Brooklyn Museum and other museums have so little sensitivity and taste, and if their public—or a good portion of it—is similarly afflicted, the problem is a cultural and spiritual one that goes deep and won't be solved by the withholding of taxes. And in the meantime, we should remember that the tax knife could cut in other directions as well. If we refuse to allow public funding for anything that might offend anyone, we could wind up with fearful, bland museums afraid to show not only Ofili's "The Holy Virgin Mary," but also the most reverent icon of the Mother of God from the Monastery of Saint Catherine in Sinai.

Having said that, if I were a private contributor to the Brooklyn Museum, I might consider withdrawing my support. The use of withheld tax money as a punishment makes for a dangerous precedent. Voting with your own checkbook makes sense. □

OF SEVERAL MINDS

WILLIAM PFAFF



TAKING RELIGION SERIOUSLY

They do it in godless Europe

A striking difference between intellectual debate in Europe and in the United States is the importance accorded religion and religious thought in what otherwise is a largely secularized—even "post-Christian"—Europe.

The United States has the churchgoers, the highest level of religious attendance in any of the industrial countries. Religion has a place in American public life, but a narrowly limited one. The Senate has a chaplain who prays over its deliberations. The president presides over "prayer breakfasts." Most presidents make a point of conspicuous Sunday church attendance, even when their piety is not otherwise evident. Clergy are invited to deliver the innocuous homily or bestow an "interfaith" blessing on public occasions. But when political figures, academic specialists, and public intellectuals get down to serious business, the clergy are expected to leave and shut the door behind them.

Religious and "value" issues are intensely debated in the country's political campaigns. Communities are riven by the abortion debate and "creation science." Public school prayer and other civic manifestations of establishment Protestantism—which were common-

"What this country needs is more miracles, right, Reverend?"

place in the United States in the 1950s and before, when the country had not yet decided to become a multicultural society—would still be widespread were it not for the modern Supreme Court's rulings against them, and the unflagging vigilance of the American Civil Liberties Union. However, religion and religious thought find virtually no place in the mainstream intellectual debates of the nation. Religions exercise public influence only as pressure groups or lobbies—not on the merits of the arguments they make about society. Their statements on general public issues have an impact on congressional debate or executive policy making only when there is a threat of political campaign intervention.

Recently, I spent three days at a forum sponsored by the Czech government and presided over by Czech President Vaclav Havel. The topics included issues confronting the so-called "transitional" countries of the former Communist bloc; relations between the developed countries and the poor ones; and the prospect before us as we enter the new millennium. This was one of many such meetings held this premillennium year. Notable, though, was the mix of backgrounds among those invited. Participants included former Communist-bloc dissidents—President Havel and Adam

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Celebrating 75 years of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition at its most thoughtful—and controversial.

EDITED BY PATRICK JORDAN AND PAUL BAUMANN

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Liberal Convictions, Catholic Traditions

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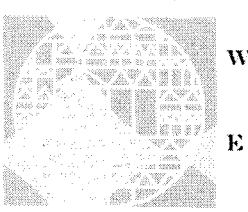

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Manny in the Wasps' Nest

Small, dark, with big spectacles and the voice of a corncrake.
He knew where he was. He kept it clean but he kept it fast.
He was the only thing moving, and there sat the solid crowd,
not so grim as they looked to him nor nearly so meaty.

It was like a truce. They laughed a little, and then more
because it was short and Manny was a comic; his dying mother-in-law
said, "Get a handsome stone... Not bad," and he flashed his diamond,
and they laughed indulgently as though they were free to laugh with
him.

He came by an error, but he was there to give and they to receive,
and it was a kind of truce.
He told a joke, did a trick with the diamond ring, told a joke:
his mother-in-law said, "'What's this fly doing in my soup?'
I said to her, 'I think it's the breast-stroke.'"

He set fire to a guest's handkerchief, but it turned out whole,
as did the cut rope—
("nothing gets destroyed," said Manny, "nobody gets embarrassed...").
He played a flute shaped like a toilet-plunger, and a snake
rose jerkily out of a basket with a scarf in its mouth.

They met on formal terms: his: laughter. It was a sort of
truce-by-chance.
All chasms, baskets; all snakes, stuffed, with jewels to return;
(no one embarrassed; nothing gets destroyed).
Small dark and different on the point of a needle.
At the end, "God bless you," said Manny, "and let's dance."

Josephine Jacobsen

Michnik from Poland; Russian human-rights defender Serguey Kovalyov; Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel; South Africa's former president, Willem de Klerk; the Hashemite Prince El Hassan bin Talal of Jordan and Hanan Ashrawi of the Palestinian Legislative Council; George Soros, Jeffrey Sachs, and Osvaldo Sunkel from the worlds of finance and economics; and political intellectuals from academia and journalism.

However, there was also a Christian Orthodox metropolitan from Turkey, a Tendai Buddhist abbot from Japan, an American rabbi now living in London, a German theologian, and an Islamic scholar. They joined one another in a religious assembly in the fourteenth-century Saint Vitus Cathedral, together with President Havel and the other participants, but they were mainly at the meeting to contribute intellectually. This is not uncommon in Europe. Each year the famous Davos World Economic Forum includes sessions on issues of religion and society. Some call it a hypocritical tribute from an annual celebration of capitalist materialism, but the accusation of insincerity is unjustified.

The Italian lay Catholic Community of Sant'Egidio is greatly respected for the quality of its annual conferences on society and religion, as well as for astute and discreet peace-making interventions in Kosovo and Algeria. Meetings on relations between Islam and the West—the "clash of civilizations"—as in Barcelona last April, sponsored by the government of Catalonia, routinely include Islamic and Christian religious scholars.

I know of little comparable to this in the United States. The Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs is the only mainstream group I know that continues to foster the ethical dialogue on political issues between secular and religious thinkers. Americans go to church or synagogue (and, increasingly, to mosques), but religion is rarely acknowledged as having something serious to contribute to general intellectual and policy debates.

In Europe, religion seems to have lost its mass following or—as in the North European Protestant countries—to have transformed the religious inheritance of Lutheranism, Calvinism, and Methodism into versions of secular ethics. Yet religion is still considered a legitimate participant in intellectual discourse, and is so treated in universities, public institutions, and even the press.

In the United States, the great universities that began as Protestant seminaries have secularized themselves since the 1930s. Most Catholic universities, since the 1960s, have experienced a crisis of identity. The Christian religions, and Catholicism in particular (despite the fact that it has the most imposing intellectual legacy of all the churches), are the only minority groups in the United States today whom it is politically correct to denigrate.

Possibly the old and sterile battle between scientists and Protestant literal interpreters of the Bible is responsible for American intellectual and academic intolerance of religion. A part of the explanation may lie in the American tradition of philosophical pragmatism. Whatever the explanation, the intellectual coexistence of religious and secular thought is common in Europe, rare in the United States—and Americans are the worse for that. □

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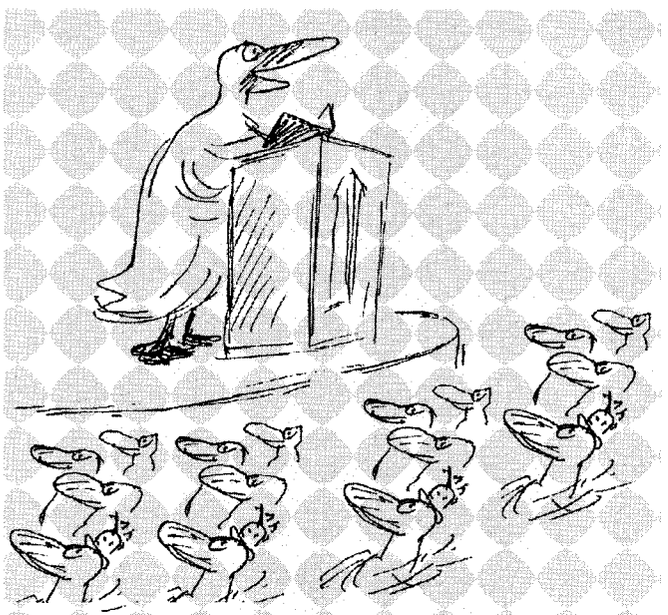
MEA CULPA, MEA MAXIMA CULPA

Can the church admit error?

Introduction ■ Can the church confess error? Will it ever do so? If so, how? Those were the questions *Commonweal* put to the four distinguished scholars and authors whose responses follow. It is increasingly apparent that the question of how doctrine can change or develop lies behind the most neuralgic conflicts facing the church today, most prominently the church's teachings on contraception and the ordination of women. Traditional notions about the development of doctrine are obviously an important part of any answer to these questions, but we pressed our contributors to take their answers beyond legalisms and theological syllogisms. Wouldn't an admission of error—in the church's past defense of slavery or in its official teachings about Judaism, for example—enhance, rather than damage, the church's credibility? Aren't the tortuous efforts to explain away dramatic reversals in church teaching—like the effort to reconcile current teaching and pre-Vatican II understandings about religious liberty—a cause of intellectual scandal as well as moral evasiveness? Isn't it fallacious to fear that admitting error would immediately call "everything" the church teaches into doubt?

After all, the intellectual prestige attached to the truth claims of modern science is strengthened by a willingness to admit error. In a different arena, and perhaps more to the point, didn't the reversal of legal precedent involved in the overturning of segregation law vindicate rather than undermine the moral authority of the Supreme Court?



"Ah, if we could but shed our troubles the way we shed water!"

Obviously such parallels are never exact and can in some ways be misleading. Revealed religion is not a merely empirical or constitution-based tradition. Still, the inability of the magisterium to explain genuine changes in practice and doctrine breeds both frustration and cynicism, if not hypocrisy. Isn't there any way to be more honest about the facts of history and the nature of historical change? How should the church go about doing so? THE EDITORS

Richard P. McBrien

A REPENTING CHURCH

France & Germany show the way

The editors of *Commonweal* have posed a three-part question on the church and the confession of error. The nature of the answer depends on the meaning given to the noun "church." One assumes, first of all, that we are speaking of the Catholic church, and not the worldwide Body of Christ. If we are speaking, on the one hand, of the church as the people of God, at least portions of that church *have* confessed error, time and time again, often openly and without equivocation. And this continues today in the public statements of various Catholic organizations, in the writings of theologians and other Catholic scholars, and in editorials and articles published in journals like *Commonweal* itself.

If, on the other hand, "church" applies to the hierarchy, that is, those who exercise the official ministries of teaching and pastoral leadership, then three points need to be made by way of a reply: (1) The church *can* confess error. (2) While the Roman magisterium has been reluctant (to say the least) to admit error, the hierarchical magisterium more broadly understood has already begun to do so. (3) We have a model for the hierarchical magisterium's admission of error in the statements of the German and French bishops on the Holocaust.

I will take up each of these points in turn.

1. The church (understood hereafter as the hierarchy) can confess error with regard to a particular teaching or disciplinary decree if none of these pertains to the deposit of faith, that is, if the charism of infallibility has not been engaged in their original promulgation. The reason is self-evident. If something is not infallible (literally, "immune from error"), it must be fallible (literally, "subject to error"). In fact, the number of infallible teachings and decrees is infin-

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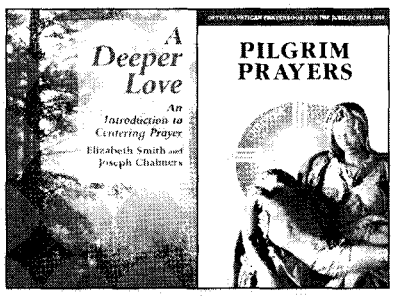

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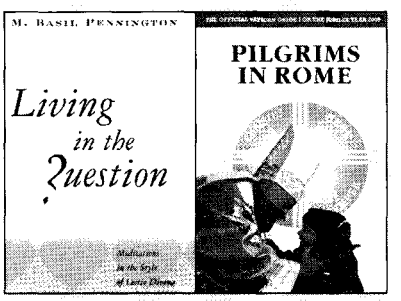

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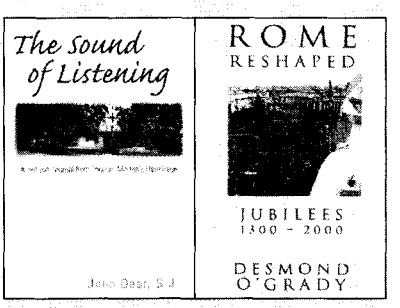

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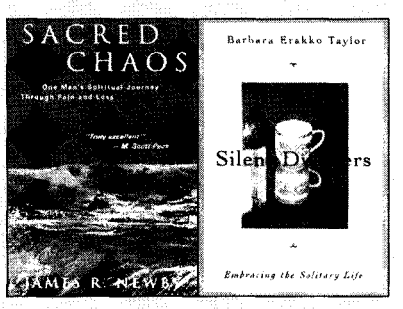

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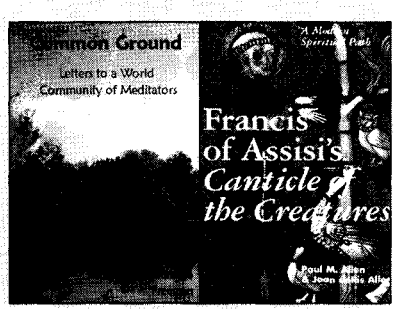

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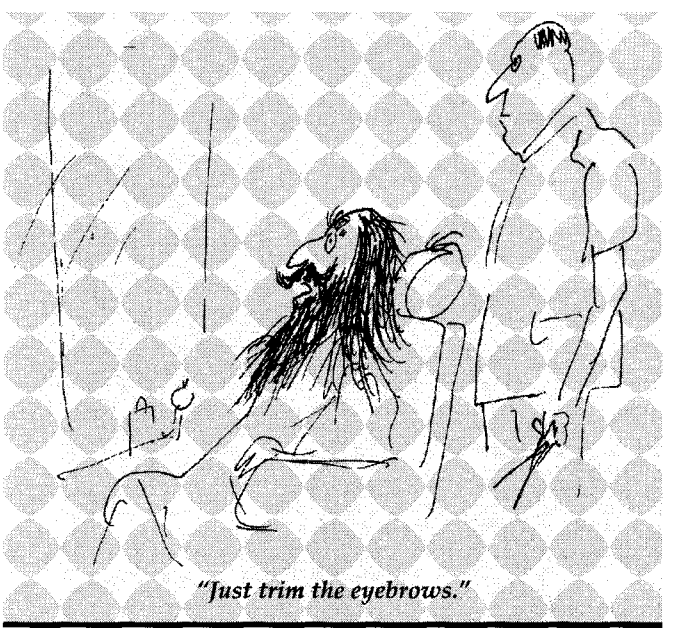
itesimally small in relation to the total corpus of teachings and decrees spread over the course of the church's two-thousand-year history. Moreover, where there is a doubt about their infallible status, it must be assumed that they are *not* infallible. This is in accordance with the Code of Canon Law: "No doctrine is understood to be infallibly defined unless it is clearly established as such" (can. 749.3). The criteria for an infallible teaching were laid down by the First Vatican Council in its own dogmatic teaching on papal infallibility. Not even a high-level congregation of the Roman curia can make up new criteria as we go along.

Some have argued that the church cannot confess error because the church is a mystery, with divine as well as human elements. Individual members of the church may err, but not the church "as such." This argument rests on the fallacy of denying the human and pilgrim nature of the church. Indeed, Scripture discloses specific errors that Jesus himself made, notwithstanding the fact that he was completely free from sin (Hebrews 4:15). He was mistaken, for example, about the identity of the high priest at the time David entered the house of God and ate the holy bread which only the priests were permitted to eat (Mark 2:26); it was Ahimelech (1 Samuel 21:1-6) who did so, not Abiathar, as Jesus thought. He was in error, too, about the fact that Zechariah, son of Jehoiada, was killed in the Temple (2 Chronicles 24:20-22); it was not Zechariah, son of Barachiah, as Jesus said (Matthew 23:35).

What applies to Jesus applies *a fortiori* to the church. If the church can commit an error (where the charism of infallibility is not engaged), on what possible grounds—theological, doctrinal, or pastoral—can it not admit the error, correct it, and move on?

2.A. The Roman magisterium, represented by the pope and the Roman curia, has been reluctant to admit error. Although the Second Vatican Council's *Declaration on Religious Freedom* acknowledged that in the course of history "there have at times appeared patterns of behavior which were not in keeping with the spirit of the gospel and were even opposed to it" (n. 12), not even this forward-looking document could bring itself to an explicit admission of error in the Roman magisterium's previous teachings on the subject of religious liberty. The document implicitly appealed instead to the development of doctrine, an issue, John Courtney Murray noted, "that lay continually below the surface of all the conciliar debates" and which was "the real sticking-point for many of those who opposed the Declaration even to the end." (*See,* his brief introduction to the document in the Abbott-Gallagher edition of *The Documents of Vatican II.*)



"Just trim the eyebrows."

The tendency within the Roman magisterium today is to blame sin and error on individual members of the church, and never on the church itself. Thus, Pope John Paul's II apostolic exhortation on the coming jubilee year 2000, *Tertio millennio adveniente* (1994), calls upon the church to acknowledge the sins of intolerance and even the use of violence "in the service of truth." But the pope implies that those sins were committed by the church's "sons and daughters," not by the church as such.

This same distinction has surfaced more recently in Cardinal Edward Cassidy's defense of last year's Vatican statement on the Holocaust, *We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah.* In a speech before the American Jewish Committee in Washington, D.C., in May 1998, this high-ranking (and justly respected) curial official said: "We do not speak of the church as sinful, but the members of the church as sinful." By contrast, the Second Vatican Council's *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* had declared: "The church, however, clasping sinners to its bosom, at once holy and always in need of purification, follows constantly the path of penance and renewal" (n. 8). The conciliar text clearly states that the church as such, not just its individual members, is "at once holy and always in need of purification," and that this purification involves "penance and renewal." The church as such is "always in need of purification" and "follows constantly the path of penance and renewal" because it is indeed a sinful church, not just in its members, but corporately and institutionally.

While sin cannot be attributed to Christ, not even in his human nature, because his human nature is hypostatically united to his divine person, there is no hypostatic union of the divine and the human in the church. Insofar as the church is divine, it is sinless. But insofar as it is human, it is sinful. *A fortiori,* if the church can sin, it can also err. Indeed, Jesus erred even though he was sinless.

2.B. Happily, there is recent evidence of a readiness on the part of the hierarchical magisterium outside of Rome to confess error. By contrast with the distinction made by the pope and Cardinal Cassidy between the church and its individual members, both the German and French hierarchies have explicitly acknowledged the sinfulness of their own churches in their failure to speak out against, and even in their active complicity with, the Nazi perpetrators of the Holocaust. In a statement issued on January 23, 1995, the German bishops pointed out that "the failure and guilt of

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that time have also a church dimension." Despite the "exemplary behavior of some individuals and groups...we were nevertheless, as a whole, a church community...who looked too fixedly at the threat to their own institutions and who remained silent about the crimes committed against the Jews and Judaism." The bishops urged the German nation to confess its guilt and to willingly and "painfully learn from this history of guilt of our country *and of our church as well*" (my emphasis). The French bishops, in their turn, also acknowledged the culpability of the church of France. In their own statement of September 30, 1997, they conceded that the loyalism and docility of "those in authority in the church" (not just individual rank-and-file members, or "sons and daughters" of the church) went "far beyond the obedience traditionally accorded civil authorities [and] remained stuck in conformity, prudence, and abstention."

Church leaders, the French bishops continued, "failed to realize that the church, called at that moment to play the role of defender within a social body that was falling apart, did in fact have considerable power and influence, and that in the face of the silence of other institutions, its voice could have echoed loudly by taking a definitive stand against the irreparable." Their statement ended on a ringing note: "In the face of so great and utter a tragedy, too many of the church's pastors committed an offense, by their silence, against the church itself and its mission....this failing of the church of France and of her responsibility toward the Jewish people are part of our history. We confess this sin. We beg God's pardon, and we call upon the Jewish people to hear our words of repentance."

3. If the hierarchical church, including even the Roman magisterium, is to confess error, how is it to do so? Have not the German and French bishops already shown the way? And did not the Second Vatican Council itself set a new standard of honest self-criticism, in acknowledging, for example, that "both sides were to blame" for the disastrous ruptures of unity brought about at the time of the Reformation (*Decree on Ecumenism*, n. 3)?

It used to be argued in the preconciliar period that "error has no rights." The council corrected that view. Error may have no rights, but persons in error do. The question today in the Catholic church is not whether error has rights, but whether error has ecclesiastical parents.

Early in the next century the Roman magisterium and other segments of the Catholic hierarchy may well join with the church's rank-and-file membership—its "sons and daughters"—in acknowledging at least some of the church's past doctrinal and disciplinary errors. If done in a manner similar to that of the French and German bishops, the new posture will surely enhance rather than diminish the church's global credibility and, therefore, its capacity for even more illuminating and compelling teaching in the future. □

The Reverend Richard P. McBrien, *professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame, is the author of* Lives of the Popes *(HarperSanFrancisco), among other books.*

Richard John Neuhaus

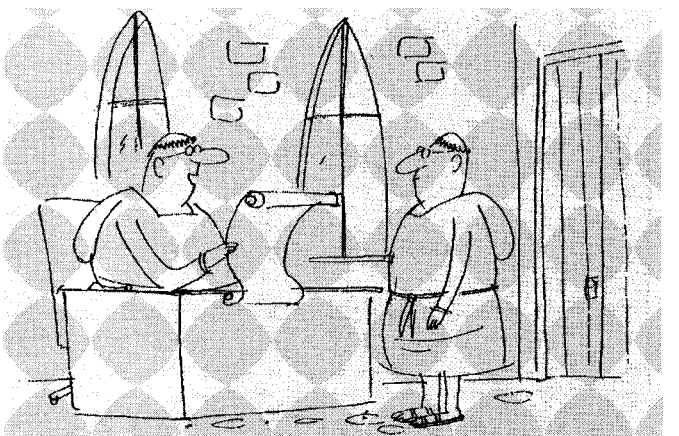
'SENTIRE CUM ECCLESIA'

Rome, *si*, California, *no*

The questions posed by the editors are, I am glad to say, very easily answered. Yes, the church can confess error. She has done so innumerable times. She does so every time her members—laity, priests, bishops, and popes—go to confession. As for more public confession of error, *see*, for instance, Luigi Accattoli's valuable little book, *When a Pope Asks Forgiveness* (Pauline Books), in which are collected no less than ninety-four statements by John Paul II expressing sorrow or repentance for corporate sins in which Catholics have been implicated.

But, of course, the editors likely did not intend to pose questions that are so easily answered. I expect the intended question goes something like this: Can the magisterium of the church confess that, in the clear exercise of its teaching authority regarding faith and morals, it has taught erroneously? Not inadequately or partially or in a way that creates misunderstanding, mind you, but erroneously. Put differently, has the church taught as true that which we now recognize as false? That way of putting the question raises the stakes by posing the question of whether the Catholic church is what she claims to be. Obviously, that is a question of considerable importance for Catholics, and everyone else as well.

In the current discussion of these questions—a discussion that has been going on for centuries—frequent reference is made to issues such as slavery, usury, and the church's relationship to Judaism. For the testing of the questions at hand, these issues are not terribly pertinent. Space does not permit an extended discussion of these interesting issues, but I believe it is accurate to say that most, but not all, of the church's leaders, like almost the entire world until the eighteenth centu-



"It needs more **chutzpah!"**

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ry, thought slavery was an unavoidable part of the social order; unlike most of the world, the church generally regretted that, sought to mitigate the cruelties attending slavery, and in notable instances tried to abolish it. As for usury, or the taking of interest, the church rightly condemned it as exploitation of human need, until the beginning of modern economics when interest was recognized as a form of partnership in enterprise. As for Judaism, the church's teaching has not taken one substantive step beyond the agonizing complexities of Paul's reflections in Romans, chapters nine through eleven.

The question is whether it is the change of discontinuity, correcting an error, or the change of continuity, developing the truth.

More interesting test issues are, for instance, the church's teaching about the two natures of Christ, the Trinity, the real presence in the Eucharist, and the canon of the New Testament. Among currently agitated moral questions, one might mention abortion, euthanasia, and eugenics. What if the church was and is wrong on these matters? Those who want the church to say that she can and has taught error typically insist that "of course" they are not questioning those great articles of faith and morals, but that, I am afraid, is an embarrassingly obvious evasion.

The subject at hand is the development of doctrine, and the classic reference here is John Henry Newman, whose argument has been embraced by the magisterium. He wrote about the church's teaching:

> From time to time it makes essays which fail, and are in consequence abandoned. It seems in suspense which way to go; it wavers, and at length strikes out in one definite direction. In time it enters upon strange territory; points of controversy alter their bearing; parties rise and fall around it; dangers and hopes appear in new relations; and old principles reappear under new forms. It changes with them in order to remain the same. In a higher world it is otherwise, but here below to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.

We should not, as is frequently done, pit change against development. Of course there is change. That is undeniable. The question is whether it is the change of discontinuity, correcting an error, or the change of continuity, developing the truth. The evidence is at times ambiguous. The question cannot in all cases be definitively adjudicated by historical study or hermeneutical reflection alone. Faith, which engages both will and disposition, is involved in whether one

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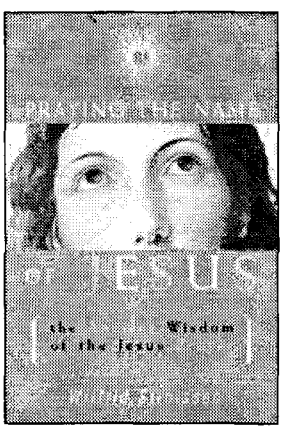

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does or does not think with the church (*sentire cum ecclesia*) and thereby discern the promised guidance of the Spirit in the development of doctrine.

I confess to being surprised when I hear it said that the church refuses to address the question of change in her teaching ministry. One of the more recent addresses is the 1990 instruction from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *The Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian*. It is a candid, careful, and thorough treatment of the questions raised with respect to change, development, dissent, and intellectual freedom. It is deserving of much more attention than it has received. It is not a secret document. Although addressed to theologians, it takes up the difficulties that any reflective Catholic might have with aspects of the church's teaching. While offering wise counsel on how to cope with such difficulties, it also readily acknowledges that such difficulties, if engaged with intellectual honesty and a disposition of *sentire cum ecclesia*, can serve as a welcome "stimulus" to the magisterium in further clarifying and developing the mind of the church.

The room for intellectual speculation and scholarship proposed by the instruction is truly capacious. I cannot imagine that I will ever be able to explore it all, never mind feel a need to go outside it. In fact, I don't know what it would mean to go outside it, since theology, understood as reflection on the Word of God encompassing everything, encompasses everything. Of course, one can decide that the church and her magisterium are not what they are claimed to be. One can decide not to think with the church, or at least not with the Catholic church that is, as distinct from the Catholic church of one's imagining. In that case, as the CDF instruction says, "the church has always held that nobody is to be forced to embrace the faith against his will."

It should occasion no sense of crisis if one has difficulties with the church's teaching. After all, the church has taught so much and so variously, and still does. One begins from the premise that the difficulty is in oneself, without excluding the possibility that the difficulty is in the teaching. To be perfect is to have changed often, and the church's articulation of the fullness of truth will not be perfect until our Lord returns in glory and "we shall know even as we are known" (1 Corinthians 13). At that point, we will no longer need the magisterium. Meanwhile, I keep in mind a letter that Walker Percy wrote to the editors of this magazine some years ago. He said he was weary of editorial complaints about Rome doing this and Rome doing that. Without Rome, he said, the Catholic church would not be as interesting as it is, and certainly there would be no Catholic novelists. He concluded by urging the editors to face up to the fact that it is "either Rome or California." It *is* Rome or California. That strikes me as an excellent motto for theologians and other reflective Catholics to keep prominently displayed where they do their thinking and writing. □

The Reverend Richard John Neuhaus *is president of the Institute on Religion and Public Life, and editor in chief of* First Things.

Elizabeth A. Johnson

GALILEO'S DAUGHTERS

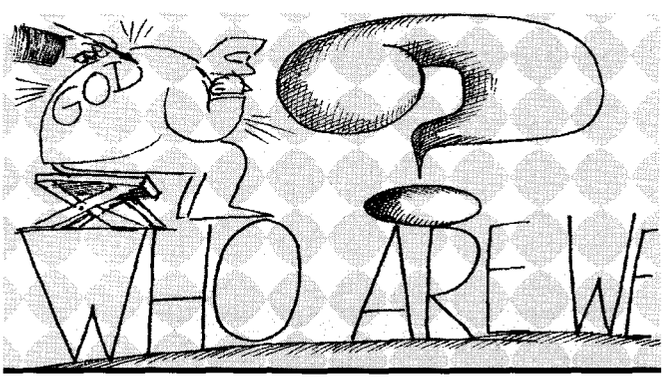
What error looks like today

Can the church confess error? Of course we can.

Whenever a human community realizes that its beliefs or practices have wreaked harm, then love of the truth and commitment to what is right and good urges such a confession in the public arena. Indeed, admitting error, acknowledging shame for past misdeeds, and even apologizing for them put the community's firm purpose of amendment into a strong and clear light. It cleanses the corporate soul and gives a new direction to behavior.

This, of course, is the genius of the sacrament of reconciliation which works to put individuals right with God. Its dynamic works no less effectively with a community as a whole. As the pilgrim people of God journeying through history, the church is not perfect but liable to sin in word and deed—*ecclesia semper reformanda*. The very fact that we confess belief in the church's holiness in the creed indicates that it is a matter of faith, proclaimed in the teeth of evidence to the contrary. When the Spirit moves the community to grow and learn in a particular area of doctrine or ethics where error has been harmful, then part of responding to the Spirit's promptings entails honest admission of what went wrong. This clears the deck for embracing the gospel vision of the reign of God more full heartedly in the future.

Those who oppose the church's confession of error inhabit a different model of the church. Theirs is an institutional model wherein the church is a perfect society whose essence or core remains untouched by intellectual failure or moral fault. I make no judgment about personal motives. But at least part of what is happening here is illumined by social analysis, which makes clear that such a position aims at maintaining a rather imperious style of church leadership. For if the church of the past could err, then the church of the present could too, a possibility that would mandate wide consultation, dialogue, and openness to correction on the part of institutional leaders. Preferring a more top-down, even autocratic exercise of authority, critics of public con-



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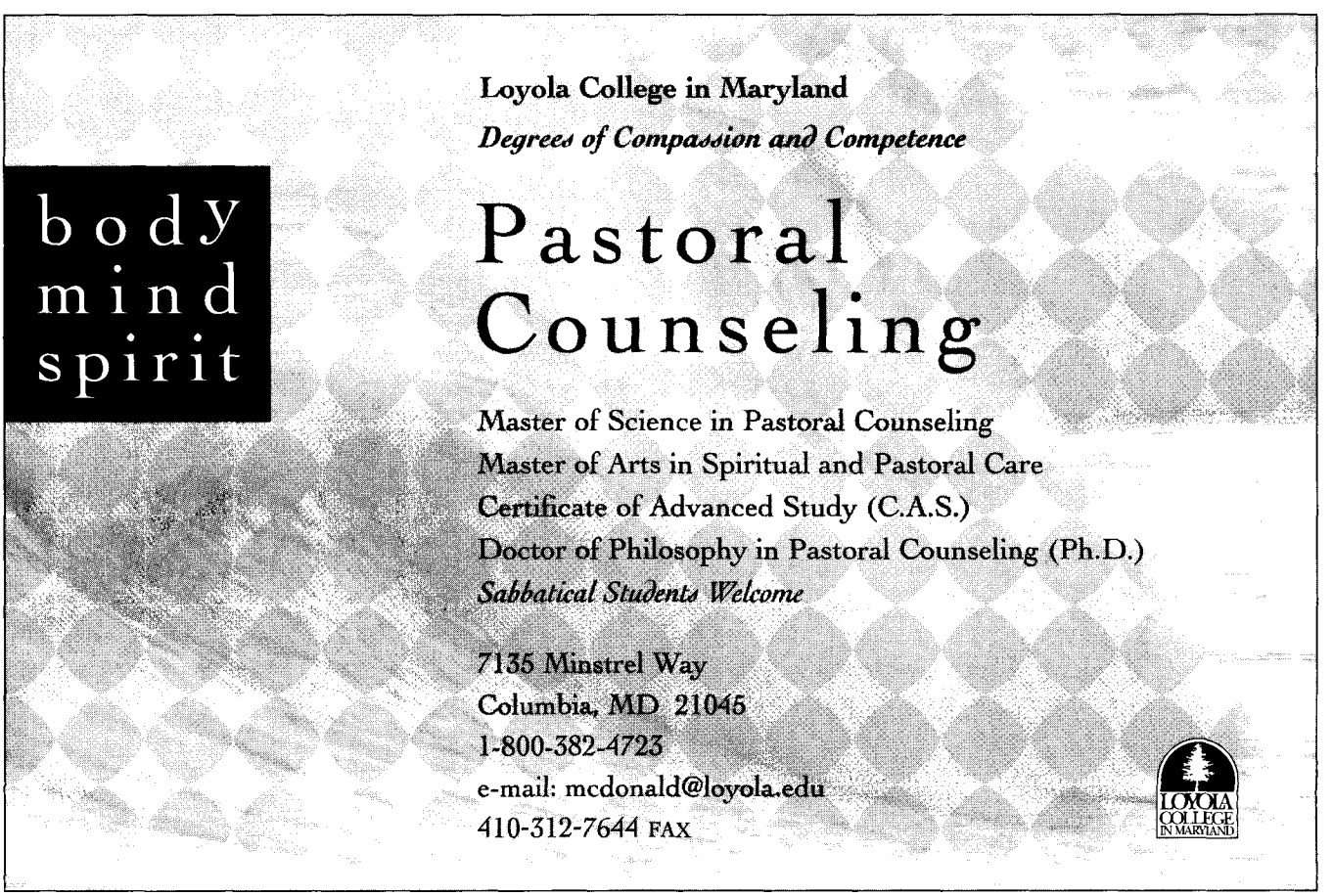
fession place the magisterium on the side of the angels. They act in defense of the power of a clerical elite.

Some seek a middle ground on this issue, not admitting that the institutional church can sin and err but recognizing that individual members do. A good example is John Paul II's letter to women written at the time of the UN Beijing Conference on Women (1995). After acknowledging the unfortunate history that has disrespected the dignity of women, relegated them to the margins, and even reduced them to servitude with great impoverishment resulting for women and the whole of humanity, the pope writes, "And if objective blame, especially in particular historical contexts, has belonged to not just a few members of the church, for this I am truly sorry."

The problem here is not the apology, which the pope rightly hopes will be transformed on the part of "the whole church" into renewed fidelity to the gospel vision on women's behalf. Rather, the difficulty resides in the failure to grasp that prejudice against women is a structural sin that pervades the history of "the whole church," not just many of its members. Similar to the structural sin the pope discerns in certain of the world's economic and political systems, this bias has conditioned ecclesial culture, life, and practice to its roots, continuing to our own day, to the "exploitation and domination" (the pope's words) of half the church's members. The failure to grasp that structural sin operates within the institutional church, and thus must to be confessed as such, all but ensures that the hoped-for transformation will be inadequate, as indeed has been the case up until now.

In the spirit of this reflection, I would like to muse about an ecclesial confession of error regarding women that I hope will be forthcoming in the near future. I imagine it to be modeled on the words said during the exoneration of Galileo, with the addition of an admission of the structural sin present in the theoretical and practical subordination of women in church history.

The Galileo case functions in the modern Western imagination as the paradigm of how in the name of God powerfully entrenched leaders silence rather than dialogue with new insights that challenge their world view. Three hundred and fifty years after the death of this scientist, the Vatican completed a review of his (in)famous trial. During a solemn ceremony, the head of the papal investigating team announced its conclusion that Galileo's judges had been wrong (the individual rather than institutional position again), while John Paul II spoke about lessons that might be learned from the case. At the heart of the conflict, the pope suggested, was the fact that to church leaders of the time "geocentrism seemed to be part of scriptural teaching itself." Wedded as they were to a literal interpretation of Scripture, they thought that since the Bible assumes the earth to be the center of the universe, this was a doctrine of the faith. In order to deal with Galileo's new discovery, they



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After Psalm 137

We're still in Babylon but
We do not weep
Why should we weep?
We have forgotten
How to weep

We've sold our harps
And bought ourselves machines
That do our singing for us
And who remembers now
The songs we sang in Zion?

We have got used to exile
We hardly notice
Our captivity
For some of us
There are such comforts here
Such luxuries

Even a guard
To keep the beggars
From annoying us

Jerusalem
We have forgotten you.

Anne Porter

would have had to revise their method of biblical interpretation. But "most of them did not know how to do so."

This difficulty was compounded by the way that church leaders just assumed the "common sense," geocentric view of their culture to be correct. Rather than examine or question it, they took it as self-evident. To avoid the conflict, "it would have been necessary all at once to overcome habits of thought, and to devise a way of teaching capable of enlightening the people of God." This they were also unable to do.

In a word, church leaders clung to traditional religious and cultural assumptions despite new evidence to the contrary. As the papal commission noted, "Galileo's judges, incapable of dissociating faith from an age-old cosmology, believed quite wrongly that the adoption of the Copernican revolution, in fact not yet definitively proven, was such as to undermine Catholic tradition, and that it was their duty to forbid its being taught. This subjective error of judgment, so clear to us today, led them to a disciplinary measure from which Galileo had much to suffer. These mistakes must be frankly recognized."

What should we learn from this case? The pope draws pastoral conclusions. Ecclesial teachers should keep abreast of advances in scholarship and culture "in order to examine, if such be necessary, whether or not there are reasons for taking them into account in their reflection or for introducing changes in their teaching." Furthermore, in so doing, pastors "ought to show genuine boldness, avoiding the double trap of a hesitant attitude and of hasty judgment, both of which can cause considerable harm."

There is no little irony in the fact that a Vatican postage stamp honoring the newly rehabilitated Galileo was issued at the same time in May 1994 that the pope issued an apostolic letter rejecting the idea that women might be ordained in the Roman Catholic church and clamping down on further dissension about the issue. This barring of women from a sacrament by which they would receive grace and become ministers of grace to others is not the totality of women's issues in the church, but it is the most symbolically and practically powerful one, a touchstone for all the rest. Could it not be that in the rush to negative judgment and the effort to block further ripening of the issue in the church the judges are once again making a serious mistake?

Throughout the church, the gospel vision of a community of the discipleship of equals is as compelling to persons converted from sexism as the centrality of the sun was to Galileo—neither men nor the earth can claim to be the center of the system. The literal interpretation of texts about Jesus choosing only twelve male apostles is as archaic as biblical descriptions of the geocentric structure of the universe. The inability of the judges to revise their methods of biblical interpretation in the case of women is less excusable, for biblical scholarship, including the Pontifical Biblical Commission, has shown that the New Testament offers no impediment to and many promptings toward women's full participation in ministry. Incapable of dissociating faith from an outdated, patriarchal anthropology, church leaders believe quite wrongly that the adoption of the women's revolution would undermine Catholic tradition, and so they turn a blind eye to the new sky of moons around Jupiter and star-birthing nebulae, for example, women's competencies and hearts full of call. This subjective error of judgment, so clear to us today, leads them to take measures from which women and the whole church have much to suffer. These mistakes must be frankly recognized. One day another confession of error will be in order.

Legend has it that at the end of his trial, having accepted silencing in lieu of torture, Galileo committed an act of resistance by whispering an endorsement of his own vision. Women and men, who have glimpsed the gospel vision of a community of equals where "there is no more Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, for all are one in Christ Jesus" (Galations 3:28), and whose spirits have been set on fire by its beauty, join Galileo's spirit in uttering an affirmation of a vision that cannot be quenched: "Nevertheless, it moves." □

Sister Elizabeth A. Johnson, C.S.J., *professor of theology at Fordham University, is the author of* She Who Is *(Crossroad).*

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Joseph Komonchak

RENEWING AUTHORITY

The lesson of *Dei verbum*

First, let me set the stage by offering three brief anecdotes about the anxieties raised by doctrinal development and change within the church. Once, when the Reverend Myles M. Bourke, former professor of Sacred Scripture at Dunwoodie, the major seminary of the Archdiocese of New York, was presenting an interpretation that denied the complete historical character of a scriptural passage, a student in the back of the class made a sound like that of a page being ripped from a book. A couple of years later, Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani, head of the Holy Office, tried, unsuccessfully, to persuade Cardinal Francis Spellman to remove Bourke from the seminary faculty because of his interpretation of the infancy narrative in Matthew's Gospel. A few years later, a New York priest unhappy with developments in Catholic biblical scholarship noticed a copy of the slim journal titled *The Bible Today* and asked a colleague, "Is that all that's left of that great big book?"

These anecdotes illustrate the difficulty that some Catholics experienced roughly around the time of Vatican II in accepting the application of modern critical methods to the interpretation of the Bible, particularly when it called into question the historicity of important biblical stories, such as the creation, actions, and fate of Adam and Eve but, even more acutely, the words and deeds of Jesus Christ. A draft document prepared for the approval of the bishops at the Second Vatican Council taught "the absolute immunity of all Holy Scripture from error" as a simple logical conclusion from the divine inspiration of the Bible, which, it said, necessarily excludes "any error in any matter." During the conciliar debates it was urged that a simple reading of the Bible should be enough to require people to nuance that statement. In the end the council issued instead a document on divine revelation (*Dei verbum*) which stated that the authority of the Scriptures, including its inerrancy, had to be considered in the light of God's purpose in inspiring the Bible, which is that of our salvation.

The final conciliar text represented a significant step in the Catholic church's struggle with an issue that modern science and history had thrust upon believers concerning the divine authority of Scripture, a struggle which still disturbs some other churches, as the type of literalism and concordism represented by "creationism" illustrates. Among Catholics, instead, the struggle concerns the authority of the teaching office they believe was instituted by Christ and promised the assistance of the Holy Spirit. As this symposium illustrates, we are still working our way through this

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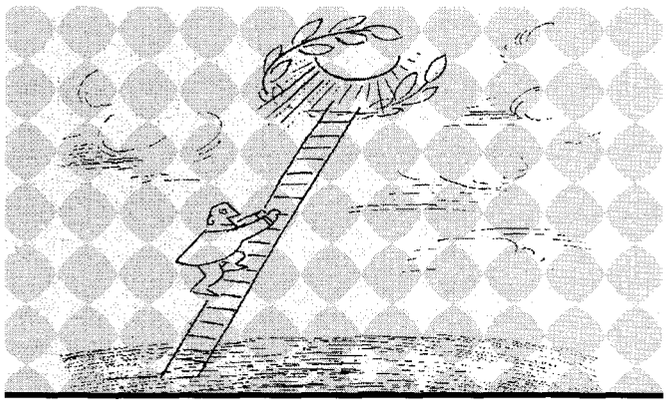

problem and have not yet arrived at as peaceful a solution as we have reached, at least in principle, with regard to biblical authority.

This is odd. After all, we have worked our way through the difficulties of admitting the divine inspiration of a psalm which begins with a beautiful lament beside the waters of Babylon but ends by blessing the one who dashes the children of the daughter of Babylon against the rocks. Should it be more difficult to admit that Pope Leo X erred when he condemned Luther's saying that "it is a sin against the Holy Spirit to burn heretics"?

By his many expressions of regret for the mistakes, failures, and sins of Catholics over the centuries, the present pope has gone far, at least in principle, toward settling the issue. His regrets do not exempt predecessors in his office; they concern not only what was done but also what was thought and said. John Paul II recently included among them "acquiescence in methods of intolerance and even of violence in the service of the truth," words which must surely intend not only the Inquisitions but also, to cite only a few cases, the condemnation of Luther's view mentioned above, Benedict XIV's scolding of Polish bishops for not being zealous enough in enforcing civil disabilities on Jews, and his predecessors' condemnation of religious freedom in the nineteenth century. (The last of these was explicitly mentioned by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger as an example of papal teachings that have since been overturned; on another occasion the cardinal infuriated traditionalists by calling *Gaudium et spes* a "counter-*Syllabus*.")

Still there is opposition to the pope's expressions of and calls for repentance. In Italy the pope is being accused of "*mea-culpa*-ism," and in the United States a satire is circulating that shows a mock article in *L'Osservatore Romano* purporting to contain John Paul II's apology for the mistake of his first predecessor in condemning Ananias and Sapphira. More seriously, Cardinal Giacomo Biffi of Bologna has expressed the fear that "the ordinary faithful...may find their serene adherence to the mystery of the church shaken by these self-accusations." In response to similar criticisms the pope recently explained that his requests for forgiveness should not be regarded "as a display of faked humility or as a denial of the church's bimillennial history, which is certainly rich in merits in the fields of charity, culture, and holiness. It corresponds, rather, to an obligatory demand for truth which recognizes, along with positive aspects, the human limits and weaknesses of various generations of the disciples of Christ."

The opposition perhaps arises from several causes. The first is the belief that the magisterium was given to us precisely to compensate for the obscurities and uncertainties of the Scriptures, a view brought to a lopsided height when Pope Pius XII ridiculed the idea that one might judge the magisterium by the Scriptures, which would amount to judging the clear by the obscure, the explicit by the implicit. As Joseph Ratzinger has pointed out, the council restored proper balance by insisting that the magisterium is subject to the Word of God and that its first duty, a condition of its rights, is that it listen to it.

Second, there is a purely deductive reasoning which is believed to settle issues beforehand and almost by definition: The magisterium is guided by the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit will not misguide the magisterium; therefore, whatever the magisterium teaches cannot be misguided. Such exaggerated claims have their mirror-image in those who think that if a teaching office is not infallible, it is not worth listening to, that if it makes a mistake on one point, it cannot be trusted on any point—a position, by the way, that would put all us professors out of work. Yves Congar once wrote of "a veritable inflation of the category of infallibility, as if between the infallibly true and error there did not exist an immense realm of partial truth, of probable certitude [*sic*], of search and approximation, even of quite precious truths that are not guaranteed to be free of the risk of human finitude." And he quoted from Antoine Vergote, a religious psychologist: "The theological abuse of infallibility derives from a pathology with regard to truth just as legalism is a pathology with regard to morality."

Finally, there is the not always tacit assumption that the purpose of authority, including that of teaching, is to relieve those subject to it of the burden of exercising their own intelligence and freedom, to which is often associated the assumption that the Spirit's assistance to the teaching office is so powerful and assured as to make the intelligence, morals, and holiness of its occupants an irrelevancy. Neither assumption is correct.

If I may end where I began: The comparison with the Scriptures and their authority is illuminating. As one has to read the Scriptures in order to determine to what degree and in what respects their inspiration entails their inerrancy, so, if one wishes to arrive at a balanced view of the magisterium and its authority, one must undertake the sort of "serene and complete historical reconstructions" of the past that Pope John Paul II recommended at his audience on September 1, 1999, avoiding generalizing statements not only of condemnation but also of absolution. □

The Reverend Joseph Komonchak, *a priest of the Archdiocese of New York, holds the John and Gertrude Hubbard Chair in Religious Studies at The Catholic University of America.*

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The Crisis of Liberal Catholicism

A COMMONWEAL FORUM

Introduction ■ As part of our anniversary celebration, *Commonweal* has been reexamining some of the magazine's founding ideas, liberal Catholicism being a central one. We were prodded along in our resolve by a sermon that soon-to-be Cardinal Francis George gave on January 17, 1998 at Chicago's Old Saint Patrick's Church. As it happened I was at the liturgy. What's more, I was actually listening to his sermon. There came that now semi-famous moment when he said, "liberal Catholicism is an exhausted project."

There was a little buzz among the congregation, and then a little hum. It was like being back in second grade: You could hear people thinking, "Uh-oh, what does he mean by that?" Following a brief conversation after Mass, Cardinal George agreed to explain what he meant. And so he did at a *Commonweal* Forum held on Wednesday, October 6, 1999 at Loyola University (Chicago).

The forum was a sell-out event with more than three hundred people thoughtfully attending to the words of the cardinal, the second speaker, Peter Steinfels, and the three respondents, John Noonan, John T. McGreevy, and E.J. Dionne, Jr. Three hours later, everyone came out alive! Even a few liberals. The speeches and comments make up this special section.

For more than a decade as editor of *Commonweal*, I have struggled along with my colleagues to examine and, when necessary, reframe the kind of questions we ask in linking the Catholic tradition with the American political and cultural scene in which liberal values continue to play the dominant role. The clarifications and criticisms of this forum have contributed greatly to that effort. We look forward to the responses of our readers in continuing this important conversation.

MARGARET O'BRIEN STEINFELS

THE CRISIS OF LIBERAL CATHOLICISM

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The forum was sponsored by the Commonweal Foundation and Loyola University of Chicago. Generous support was provided to the forum by the Catholic Communication Campaign and the Lilly Endowment. We are grateful for their assistance. Drawings: Franklin McMahon.

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HOW LIBERALISM FAILS THE CHURCH

The cardinal explains

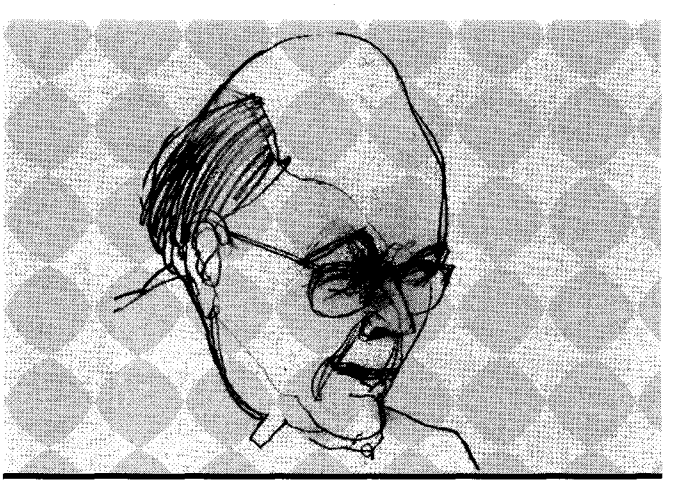
Francis George

As some of you might know, this event was conceived, in part, because of a fortuitous coming together of two circumstances. The first was my January 17, 1998 homily at a Saturday evening liturgy during a National Center for the Laity meeting in Chicago. I had not prepared a homily, because I understood someone else was to preach and I was only to give a few remarks at the end of Mass. More important, I had been told the day before by the apostolic nuncio that the Holy Father would announce on Sunday that twenty-two bishops, myself included, were to become cardinals.

As I sometimes do at turning points or crises in my life, I turned to Cardinal Newman for counsel when I learned that I was to be named a cardinal. Fresh in my mind as I celebrated Mass at Old Saint Pat's were the words of Newman's speech when he accepted the official notification of his being named cardinal. He explained on that occasion that all his life he had contested liberalism in religion, liberalism in that context meaning relativism. Reading his speech got me thinking about the context of religion today; and when I came to say a few words after I read the Gospel, I figured that, in the absence of a prepared homily, I might try to provoke a discussion among all these rather liberal folks in front of me. I believe I did. A portion of my remarks I wrote down as best I could remember later that night:

> We are at a turning point in the life of the church in this country. Liberal Catholicism is an exhausted project. Essentially a critique, even a necessary critique at one point in our history, it is now parasitical on a substance that no longer exists. It has shown itself unable to pass on the faith in its integrity and inadequate, therefore, in fostering the joyful self-surrender called for in Christian marriage, in consecrated life, in ordained priesthood. It no longer gives life.
>
> The answer, however, is not to be found in a type of conservative Catholicism obsessed with particular practices and so sectarian in its outlook that it cannot serve as a sign of unity of all peoples in Christ.
>
> The answer is simply Catholicism, in all its fullness and depth, a faith able to distinguish itself from any cultures and yet able to engage and transform them all, a faith joyful in all the gifts Christ wants to give us and open to the whole world he died to save. The Catholic faith shapes a church with a lot of room for differences in pastoral approach, for discussion and debate, for initiatives as various as the peoples whom God loves. But, more profoundly, the faith shapes a church which knows her Lord and knows her own identity, a church able to distinguish between what fits into the tradition that unites her to Christ and what is a false start or a distorting thesis, a church united here and now because she is always one with the church throughout the ages and with the saints in heaven.

I regret now a phrasing that gave some people offense because of my use of the adjective "parasitical" to describe a set of ideas and a movement which defines itself and takes life from an idea of church no longer adequate to the church's self-consciousness since the Second Vatican Council. But I regret as well the deliberate misrepresentation of what, I still believe, was clearly expressed. I have a number of friends, mostly from graduate school, who regard the Catholic church as a hypocritical system. Their judgment on the church doesn't mean they believe me to be a hypocrite, and I take no personal offense at their misunderstanding of a church I love as my mother and spouse. I understand what they are saying, even though I think they are profoundly wrong. I am saddened by their convictions and pray for their conversion, but they remain friends. Conflating ideas with the persons who espouse or even cherish them makes critical conversation impossible, in the church or anywhere else. If everyone whose cherished convictions I believe mistaken must feel insulted, we should end this conference now and bring closure as well to most other public discussions about anything of ultimate or



Cardinal Francis George, O.M.I., *is the archbishop of Chicago.*

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even of purely personal importance.

Making these remarks at a turning point in my own life combined with a second, perhaps providential, circumstance: *Commonweal* editor Margaret O'Brien Steinfels was present at that Mass. In person that evening during supper and in a later well-constructed *Commonweal* editorial, she asked me to "please explain" my remarks, especially the part about "simply Catholicism." In our conversation after Mass at Old Saint Pat's, I told Peggy that I didn't "relish getting into a national debate at this time." The time I was thinking about, of course, was the time of a Roman consistory added to the time needed to grow into being archbishop of Chicago. But perhaps now the time has come; not to say the last word, of course, because my remarks were offered as a thesis and not as an indictment, but to move along a conversation important to all Catholics, and especially to those who do not have a vested interest in personal conflict, those disturbed by the divisions which too often paralyze the mission of the church in our time.

To clarify terms, let me enumerate several contexts which enter into the definition of "liberal" and "conservative," and which need to be made explicit to advance the discussion. First, there is the political context, from which the terms take their primary meaning. Political liberals and political conservatives both define themselves in relation to government and its exercise of power. Conservatives usually associate themselves with the constituted authorities, giving them the benefit of the doubt so that the order which saves us from anarchy and social violence can be maintained. Liberals contribute to the common good by beginning most often with a suspicion about abuse of authority and a critique of the exercise of power. They are a "loyal opposition," loyal to the goals of good government but not to the established rulers when the rulers themselves impede the achievement of those goals.

In the economic context, so closely connected with the political but not identified with it unless one is a Marxist, liberals are more concerned with the distribution of wealth and look to government to see that the political equality of all citizens is mirrored, at least roughly, in their economic equality. They tend toward a suspicion of wealth comparable to their suspicion of government, because both are instances of power. Wealth's "social mortgage" easily becomes a social penalty. Conservatives, on the other hand, tend to be more concerned with the conditions of the creation of wealth and understand that the right to economic initiative cannot be separated from other individual rights and freedoms. In a business economy, they argue, all are enriched in time, even if there are serious inequalities for a time. The effects of governmental deregulation of the economy are softened, in the meantime, by personal generosity toward the poor.

The political and economic contexts, therefore, slide easily into the psychological. In the psychological context, "liberal" and "conservative" describe attitudes or mindsets toward societal change. Conservatives are closed to changes which threaten good order and liberals are more open to the risk of proposed change. Grossly caricatured, therefore, conservatives are "closed-minded" and liberals "open-minded."

In epistemological theory, the point of reference is neither political government, economic order, nor mental attitude toward societal change. Rather, respective stances toward the foundations of knowledge differentiate liberals and conservatives in the epistemological context. This was the context of Cardinal Newman's *biglietto* speech, as it was the context for his *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1845) and his *Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (1870). Conservative certitude and the legitimate quest for certitude about the foundations either of faith or of an intellectual discipline can be pushed into fundamentalism; liberal criticism of the same foundations can degenerate into skepticism or the relativism Newman constantly contested.

Finally, there is the context of American religion, the historical context in which we profess the Catholic faith. In this country, liberal religion treats God as an ideal, a goal expressing all that is best in human experience, while the real agents of change in the world are human persons. Religious language is important poetry, agnostic about who God is, but expressive of our experience of wholeness. The traditional sacraments are signs of our own interior dispositions and intentions. Worship may be structured but, at its heart, religion is ethical and the social agenda central. By contrast, conservative religion is keenly aware of God's agency. God is real, independent, powerful, active. God's presence is felt in prayer and in the reading of his holy word. Religious language is most often literal, and the Bible is often read much like a newspaper. Sacraments are signs of the interior faith given us before we receive them. The social agenda tends to be peripheral, because God will change things at the beginning of the millennium or at the apocalyptic rapture or at some other moment we can only wait for.

Neither of these historical and actual models of American religion is able to capture the Catholic sense of the church as mediator of God's life and teacher of God's truth, the church as a hierarchical communion, an organic body which comes into being as the gifts of Christ are shared and to which one is joined in order to be changed, to be converted, so that, with the help of God's grace, one can accept Christ's mission to preach the gospel to all peoples and transform the world. Before we get into "simply Catholicism," however, it would be good to stay with the historical context in exploring what I, at least, understand by liberal Catholicism.

First, I will provide a brief sketch of the "necessary" liberal Catholic project, which began in the mid-1800s and culminated with the still inadequately received Second Vatican Council. Second, I will discuss why I believe it is not unfair

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to call contemporary liberal Catholicism an "exhausted project," even though some of my best friends are liberal Catholics. Third (and in order to alienate myself from *all* personal support), I will critique "a type of conservative Catholicism" which makes the same error as liberals in an excessive preoccupation with the church's visible government. This point will be short, since I presume most of you tend toward liberal Catholicism and there is no point in preaching to the choir about the deficiencies of conservative Catholicism. Lastly, I will attempt to stroke in lightly my picture of "simply Catholicism."

By the early 1800s, the church was besieged by a movement that she had, at least in part, helped to create: the Enlightenment, or modernity (I will use these terms interchangeably). While difficult to define, modernity has at least the following two premises at its core: First, all men and women possess a dignity or value which dictates, using Kant's formulation, that they never be treated as a mere means but always as an end. All human beings ought to be *free* from unfulfilling conditions simply imposed upon them by other human beings. While the specific conditions conducive to personal fulfillment are still a subject of great debate, particularly in a "postmetaphysical" era wary of any essential or even general conception of human fulfillment, these conditions are generally referred to as "rights." These rights exist in two forms: "negative" rights (that is, "freedoms"); and "positive" rights, which are conditions that must be received from others and thus imply further duties that deeply condition freedom. Given its emphasis on every person's freedom from being used by others, this first strand of modernity has come to be known as "liberalism." It is political and economic, psychological, epistemological, and religious, as outlined above, yet each context blends into the next. In Marxist psychology and cultural criticism, for example, acceptance of a revealed religion creates a form of personal as well as social alienation.

The second core premise of modernity is the imposing of scientific method as the point of contact between human beings and the world and society into which they are born. Science is the means to social liberation as well as the unique means to liberation from the strictures of the material world. It is a method of knowing that tightly circumscribes what can be considered truly "known" and thus simply "true." As much as it was about rights, the Enlightenment was about science as *the* means to human fulfillment. In general, the founders of modernity believed that through observation of sensed objects and induction, the laws of the material and human worlds could be discovered and their discovery would make possible the perfecting of life in this world. Since medieval remainders such as religious claims and dubious "universals" neither promoted human fulfillment nor accorded with the epistemological rules of the scientific method, they were to be consigned to the status of interesting examples of now superseded consciousness made irrelevant by human progress.

The Enlightenment and its two strands—liberalism and science—did not, of course, emerge spontaneously. Its precursors are well known, and are located in that thousand-year period we call the Middle Ages. Enlightenment thinkers radicalized or appropriated, and then combined, what had been bequeathed to them: humanism, philosophical nominalism, the Copernican revolution, and the implications of the Reformation. From humanism came the Enlightenment celebration of the universal dignity and rights of the individual, and a commitment to moral perfection in this world. From nominalism they adopted skepticism about traditional ethics and theology. From the Copernican revolution came a supreme confidence in science as the primary means through which the improvement of life in this world would occur. From the Reformation and its consequent religious pluralism developed the secularization of politics and culture.

Among these sources, humanism has Christian roots, as has the conviction that a well-ordered universe contains an intrinsic intelligibility. The Reformation is a Christian movement. The gradual recognition of the dignity of all men and women and their capacity for responsible freedom is difficult to understand unless one traces those notions, at least in part, to the gradual working out of the implications of the Incarnation. The Enlightenment, therefore, was not devoid of *semina verbi*. The challenge for the church lay in distinguishing the erroneous aspects of modernity from those that were compatible with, and even developments of, the Christian faith. The challenge was compounded when major Enlightenment figures regarded the church's doctrines and her hierarchy as the primary enemies of modern enlightenment.

In some ways, they were and we are. The church's first historical encounter with the Enlightenment project—which it would thereafter simply refer to as "liberalism"—was the French Revolution. The memory of thousands of priests and nuns exiled, imprisoned, tortured, and executed; of state control of religion and the suppression of the church; of a dictator who was a Lenin before his time, these determined the church's officially negative attitude toward liberalism for a century. Formal denunciations of liberalism, in whole or part, appeared in Pius IX's *Syllabus of Errors*, and in Leo XIII's *Immortale Dei*, *Libertas praestantissimum*, *Longinque oceani*, and *Testem benevolentiae*.

But in the midst of the controversy, a group now known as the "liberal Catholics" began to distinguish and assess the various aspects of modernity—cultural, political, and economic. Their names are familiar: Lamennais, Montalembert, Lacordaire, Ozanam, Acton, Newman, and Döllinger. While they differed profoundly in their analyses and their conclusions, common to each one's thinking was a rejection of certain *cultural* aspects of modernity, particularly materialism, secularism, moral relativism, and individualism. Also common to each was the conviction that only a unified, energetic, convincing, and engaged church

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could solve these developing cultural problems. In their search for means to promote such a church in the midst of pluralism and increased state power, they began to use the church's own history in order to question the church's nineteenth-century thinking on the *political* and *economic* aspects of liberalism. While state-protected religious freedom had been associated with indifferentism, they pointed out that religious establishment also held the potential for state interference and even suppression, and for church corruption as well. They argued that freedom of religion would make the church more effective, and the American experience, for all its difficulties, supported this conclusion. The clash between faith and culture could be best addressed by embracing liberal political and economic institutions rather than by rejecting them out of hand.

The church's assessment of economic and political liberalism continued throughout the better part of this century, adding new rationales and nuances that are now part of our teaching. Rights language was appropriated not only to protect private property and the free market but also to protect against their misuse by early capitalists. Because of their dignity, all persons possessed the right to family wages and safe working conditions. As the ultimate guarantor of human rights, the state had the duty to exercise a concern for the poor and family life and intervene in the economy when necessary. A representative, well-constituted democratic state would be more likely to intervene appropriately. But the state was not to be the only solution to social problems. Nonstate institutions such as unions and social-service agencies were equally or more capable of solving social problems; a limited state was apt to be less corrupt and more efficient; and the relational and self-constituting nature of the person meant that voluntary, mediating institutions were critical for the formation of persons and culture. Most important, the family is the foundation of any culture and the building block of any society, and the state has the obligation to protect and foster family life. From this logic, the principle of subsidiarity was crafted and endorsed. The church's engagement with the modern world it had both resisted and helped create eventually resulted in the endorsement of a free society found in *Dignitatis humanae, Gaudium et spes,* and *Centesimus annus.*

Do these societal developments and the liberal economic and political institutions born of them provide models for the church's internal life? Yes and no. As the teaching of the Second Vatican Council—particularly that of *Lumen gentium*—makes clear, the church is not merely a society. In the early modern era, Cardinal Robert Bellarmine, arguing against a Protestant conception of the church as simply invisible with adventitious visible expression, created an ecclesiology of the visible church defined as a society. The church could be understood by looking at the Kingdom of France or the Republic of Venice. This reactive model is flawed to the extent it loses the relationships between the visible and invisible gifts that constitute the church. These relationships are the stuff of ecclesial communion. They are created among and for us when the gifts of Christ are shared. These gifts, beyond invisible grace itself, are the visible government of

Entranced

I

For openers
any wall has doors in it.

Openers (who want
a door not for air
but for passing through)

open & shut it
forcefully, under
heavy pressure
from the atmosphere
outside.

The ideal opener investigates
those osmotic waterfalls
which infiltrate
doorless walls

II

To enter the enclosure
of the garden
or the citadel

be door, be son
or daughter

be the dearness
of pleasure.

Exits are disclosure.
Making an exit
can unlock you—
the way entrances do—

to being
outgoing.

In verse & reverse
word and worm
both turn.

Marie Ponsot

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pastors in succession to the Twelve, the gospel as developed in the creeds and Catholic doctrine, and the seven sacraments which sanctify men and women through the action of the risen Christ. Through these gifts, Christ is always present as the Way (our shepherd or pastor), the Truth (our teacher), and the Life (our sanctifier).

Because her relationship to her Lord is always one of dependence and her relationship to her apostolic foundation is normative, the church's teaching and constitution cannot simply be apprehended and analyzed at will, using societal categories from any age. Yet neither is the church's history unrelated to the designs of Providence. Given historical circumstances, concepts such as personal autonomy, political sovereignty, and democratic equality can contribute to human fulfillment and should be instantiated in political and economic structures and enter into the church's social doctrine. The church is indebted to the early liberal Catholics not only for restoring to the center of the church's consciousness the gospel's assertion that Christ set us free, but also for the insight and analysis that enabled the church herself to break free of the conservative societal structures in which she had become imprisoned. But because democracy is a legitimate and desirable form of political governance doesn't make the Lord's own gift of ecclesiastical hierarchy illegitimate, even though it can raise good questions about how power given by God should be used to make his people holy. The primary criterion in judging any idea or form of church governance remains the church's fidelity to her Lord.

Instead of understanding Vatican II as a limited accommodation to modernity for the sake of evangelizing the modern world, the liberal project seems often to interpret the council as a mandate to change whatever in the church clashes with modern society. To caricature somewhat, the project both for ecclesial renewal and for mission in the world takes its cues from the editorial page of the *New York Times* or, even worse, *USA Today*. The church provides motivation and troops to meet the world's agenda as defined by the world. This is a dead end, because the church's mission would then have nothing original to contribute to the world's self-understanding. This is not to say that many so-called "gospel values" or *semina verbi* are not to be found on the editorial pages of the *New York Times*, or even *USA Today*; it is to say that God's ways are not our ways and that the greatest contribution the church makes to the world is to preach gospel truths in ways that, inevitably, will both comfort and confront any society in which she takes up Christ's mission.

Behind the crisis of visible authority or governance in a liberal church lies a crisis of truth. In a popular liberal society, freedom is the primary value and the government is not supposed to tell its citizens how to think. The cultural fault line lies in a willingness to sacrifice even the gospel truth in order to safeguard personal freedom construed as choice. Using sociology of knowledge and the hermeneutics of suspicion, modern liberals interpret dogmas which affront current cultural sensibilities as the creation of celibate males eager to keep a grasp on power rather than as the work of the Holy Spirit guiding the successors of the Apostles. The bishops become the successors of the Sanhedrin and the church, at best, is the body of John the Baptist, pointing to a Jesus not yet risen from the dead and, therefore, a role model or prophet but not a savior. Even Jesus' being both male and celibate is to be forgotten or denied once the risen Christ can be reworked into whomever or whatever the times demand. Personal experience becomes the criterion for deciding whether or not Jesus is *my* savior, a point where liberal Catholics and conservative Protestants seem to come to agreement, even if they disagree on what salvation really means. Liberal culture discovers victims more easily than it recognizes sinners; and victims don't need a savior so much as they need to claim their rights.

All this is not only a dead end, it is a betrayal of the Lord, no matter the good intentions of those espousing these convictions. The call to personal conversion, which is at the heart of the gospel, has been smothered by a pillow of accommodation. The project for a liberal Catholic church is as unoriginal as the project for a liberal reinterpretation of the mission for the church. A church, all of whose ministries, construed only functionally, are open to any of the baptized; a church unwilling to say that all homosexual genital relations are morally wrong; a church which at least makes some allowance for abortion when necessary to assure a mother's freedom; a church accepting contraception as moral within marriage and prudent outside of marriage; a church willing to admit the sacramentally married to a second marriage in complete sacramental communion; a church whose teaching has to stand the acid test of modern criticism and personal acceptance in order to have not just credibility but legitimacy—there is nothing new in all this. It already exists, but outside the Catholic church.

Liberal Catholicism, in the too general and somewhat unfair way I have sketched it here, has not sufficiently distinguished between the properly theological warrants necessary to argue convincingly to some of its *desiderata* and the reasons for ecclesial change that take their strength merely from a liberal culture which tells us, as all cultures do, what to think and how to act. In an apostolic church, however, the burden of proof for changing established doctrinal and moral teaching rests on those who ask for change. The faith of the Apostles and martyrs, of Iraeneus and Augustine, of Bridget of Sweden and Catherine of Siena, of Thomas of Canterbury and Thomas More, of Elizabeth Ann Seton and John Neumann, of Edith Stein and Maximilian Kolbe, of our parents and grandparents cannot be set aside to make our contemporaries happy or ourselves free of personal responsibility and its consequent guilt. When the apostolic faith is preached in its integrity to the young, to those who have not grown up

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in a church which confined them and who have found themselves, instead, trapped in our secularized culture, they take notice. Here is something different. They do not always agree, but they are open in ways surprising to those whose own liberating experiences are still bound up with the immediate aftermath of the Second Vatican Council.

Alexis de Tocqueville suggested that the centrality of the idea of equal individual rights sets Americans up for the triumph of relativism and individualism. Are these cultural proclivities, which make it hard to hear the gospel, the immediate result of liberal political institutions? Criticizing John Courtney Murray, David Schindler argues that rules of engagement between faith and culture that prevent the state, which helps to shape a culture, from informing itself religiously inevitably favor world views that demand public silence about God. Personally, I tend to think that the practical case for making our liberal political and economic institutions responsible for the culture which now clashes so grievously with the faith is still to be adequately made. Nonetheless, these liberal institutions have not prevented our developing a culture which is increasingly hostile to revealed truth or any truth that is not "made true" by personal choice.

In response to both a secular liberal culture and its perceived impact on the church, a certain type of conservative Catholicism picks up the debate on the wrong terms. Seeing that, in a genuine clash between modern or any other culture and the apostolic faith, the faith remains normative, conservative Catholicism in some of its reaction takes refuge in earlier cultural forms of faith expression and absolutizes them for all times and all places. While certain that it differs fundamentally from liberal Catholicism, this conservatism shares the Bellarminian understanding of the church as society. The hierarchy therefore become central, responsible for all good as well as for all ills, able to correct all aberrations by invoking their authority. Correct in understanding that the church is essentially conservative in handing on the apostolic faith, contemporary conservative Catholicism can fail to see that the church is also, for that very reason, radical in its critique of any society. Just as liberal Catholicism is frequently uneasy with the church's understanding of the gift of human sexuality when her teaching runs up against the popular Freudianism of the sexual revolution, conservative Catholicism is often uneasy with the church's understanding of a just society when her social teaching draws conclusions about social services and the distribution of wealth from the premise of universal human solidarity.

The neuralgic point, therefore, is the human person. Both conservatism and liberalism, in religion and other fields in America, tend to look on the person as a bundle of desires or dreams, animal impulses and higher aspirations, which are synthesized individually by choice and controlled socially by law. Law, therefore, is always an imposition, an imposition gladly internalized in some areas by liberals and in others by conservatives. In religion, liberal pastoring means assuring people that the unconditional love of God means putting aside even moral laws when they get in the way of personal fulfillment; conservative pastoring means insisting on law without linking it clearly to the truths that Christ reveals about the dignity and freedom of the human person. The human person is the way of the church, but her understanding of what it means to be human is taken from her belief in who Christ is, a belief born of our living together, in ecclesial communion, Christ's own life.

The church does have power given her by Christ, the power to proclaim the gospel and celebrate the sacraments and pastor his people. Since any claim to power in a popular liberal culture has to be justified by pointing to it as service or by claiming its popular ratification or reception, the church in this culture is called to examine constantly her use of power. She cannot reduce the gospel, however, to what the culture will bear. We are back to "simply Catholicism," which locates power in Christ and in his gift of authority to the Twelve. The church preaches Jesus Christ, not herself; but Christ cannot be adequately known except from within his Body, the church.

Within the church, the bishops are the reality check for the apostolic faith. They are not free to change established dogma or create new doctrines, unless they want to become heretics. In being presented as a revolution rather than a development of doctrine, the Second Vatican Council has left some Catholics with the impression that bishops control rather than preserve the apostolic faith. If bishops won't change, it must be fear or willfulness or perhaps stupidity that prevents their being enlightened. It is then up to Catholics with an agenda to force them to change or to make the changes themselves, in a separate peace. But a church of such factions not only cannot evangelize, it cannot think. That is the greatest practical difficulty, it seems to me, in the use of the terms "liberal" and "conservative." When they are applied now, or even as they were sometimes applied in papal documents in the last century, people stop thinking things through. In thinking things through in the church, bishops are the verification principle in the development of doctrine.

Pastorally, bishops are ordained to headship, which does not exhaust leadership. Leadership is influence; sometimes it is based on office, sometimes on charism or purely personal gifts; always, in the church, it is more obviously from Christ when the leader's friendship with the Lord is evident. When headship and leadership are not adequately distinguished, then either every leader has to become a priest or every priest has to recognize the injustice of co-opting leadership and become just like those who minister only out of the sacraments of baptism and confirmation. In either case, Christ's original gift of the Twelve disappears or is no longer adequately visible.

The current PBS series on Pope John Paul II ["John Paul II: Millennial Pope"] raises the question: Is this a pope for our times or against our times? The only adequate answer is: both. That is "simply Catholicism." □

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REINVENTING LIBERAL CATHOLICISM

Between powerful enemies & dubious allies

Peter Steinfels

Let's not waste a minute: What is a crisis? What is liberal Catholicism?

Crisis. From the Greek verb *krisis*, turning point, from *krinein*, to separate, decide. According to the *American Heritage Dictionary*, a crisis is "a crucial turning point or situation in the course of anything." A crisis is "an unstable condition in political, international, or economic affairs in which an abrupt or decisive change is impending." A crisis is "the point in a story or drama at which hostile forces are in the most tense state of opposition."

Is liberal Catholicism at a crucial turning point? Is liberal Catholicism in an unstable condition, on the verge of significant change, and facing a moment of decision? Has liberal Catholicism reached a point in its history at which hostile forces are gathered and looming?

My answer to those questions is yes.

But what is liberal Catholicism? Note that I have not picked up one definition from the dictionary that might lead us to think of the crisis of liberal Catholicism as "a sudden change in the course of an acute disease." Actually, acute disease is a mild epithet for liberal Catholicism in comparison to some that have been applied to it.

Almost exactly a hundred years ago, a little book appeared in the United States. It was titled simply *What Is Liberalism?* but in reality it concerned itself extensively with Catholic liberalism or liberal Catholicism. *What Is Liberalism?* announced itself as a translation and adaptation of a book published thirteen years earlier in Spain, with a title that pretty bluntly answered the question: *El liberalismo es pecado*—"Liberalism Is a Sin"!

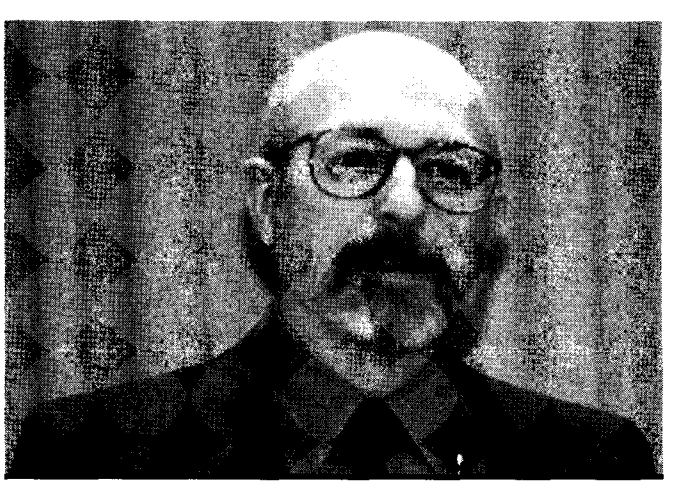
Not merely a sin, but "a greater sin than blasphemy, theft, adultery, homicide, or any other violation of the law of God." Liberalism is "the evil of evils." It is the "offspring of Satan and the enemy of mankind." And since liberalism is pervasive, protean, insidiously seductive, the liberal Catholic is a particularly dangerous "monstrosity," a "traitor and a fool," a pagan at heart, a pawn of the Devil, "less excusable than those liberals who have never been within the pale of the church."

This book, by the way, was officially commended by the Sacred Congregation of the Index, and it remains in print today.

If we proceed, however, a little more, as they say, nonjudgmentally, we find that liberal Catholicism is the standard label for the currents of thought and action that arose in the wake of the French Revolution, Napoleon's remaking of Europe, and the restoration of traditional monarchies. This movement aimed at bringing the church into a constructive engagement with the demands for freedom of thought and expression, constitutional government, democracy, and national self-determination.

Liberal Catholicism always had a complex relationship to liberalism. Liberal Catholicism's roots were in Romanticism, not the Enlightenment, and it shared in the Romantic period's reaction, common to both liberals and conservatives, against atomistic rationalism. Liberal Catholicism began with a concern for freedom, not of the individual, not of the dissenting conscience, not of an aspiring class, but of the Catholic church. Its pioneers were not revolutionaries but restorationists, who dreamed of restoring the church's cultural power. Initially they rebelled not against the church's use of the throne but against the throne's intervention in the affairs of the church. Then they rebelled against the alliance of throne and altar because they saw the possibility of reconquering society for Catholic Christianity doomed as long as the church remained chained to bankrupt regimes. Only at the end of this process did they conclude that the freedom necessary for the church to prevail implied the general freedom of all.

Although the relationship between church and state was the leading issue that defined liberal Catholicism, and one



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that today seems pretty much resolved by *Dignitatis humanae*, the Vatican Council's decree on religious liberty, liberal Catholicism was characterized by several other traits.

First, liberal Catholicism rejected the blanket condemnation of the French Revolution, industrialism, and modern liberties. Liberal Catholicism embraced an enormous range of attitudes toward these world-shaking developments. Its ranks included constitutional monarchists *and* republicans, democrats *and* aristocratic critics of democracy, nationalists *and* internationalists, defenders *and* opponents of *laissez-faire* economics. And from the Ireland of Daniel O'Connell to England, Belgium, France, Italy, Germany, and Poland, each nation had its own special form of liberal Catholicism. What they agreed upon, and what divided them from many fellow believers as well as church authorities, was their insistence on distinctions and nuance in evaluating modernity, rather than sweeping condemnation.

Second, liberal Catholicism believed that change had become not exceptional but the normal condition of life, and that the church should embrace it as an opportunity rather than denounce it as an affliction.

Third, liberal Catholicism had an almost unbounded confidence in the power of truth and its capacity to conquer error if allowed free play on the terrain of open discussion. Perhaps more than anything else, this distinguished liberal Catholics from their adversaries, who were convinced that a weak human nature, inclined to evil, would fall victim to error unless protected by state power, official censorship, church control of education, and tight limits on theological discussion.

Fourth, liberal Catholicism insisted on the relative autonomy of distinct spheres of human activity, whether in politics or religion or science or art and literature. Although ultimately the formed conscience must make a moral judgment, each field has its independent criteria that must also be scrupulously respected. In this conception, liberal Catholicism reflected the modern segmentation of life often associated with secularization. Here, too, was one of the sources of liberal Catholicism's conflict with church authorities.

Fifth, liberal Catholicism was reluctantly caught up in the impossibility of separating its initial thrust toward evangelization of the culture from internal reform of the church. Most liberal Catholics, for example, began as ultramontane defenders of the papacy, but repeated condemnations by Rome as well as a Burkean belief in preserving local powers against domineering central ones pushed them to oppose papal centralization. Their belief in law and deliberation,

(Continued on page 34)

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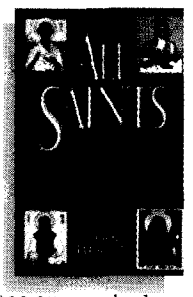

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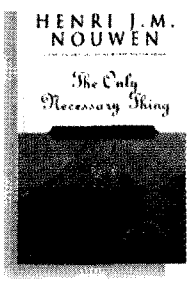

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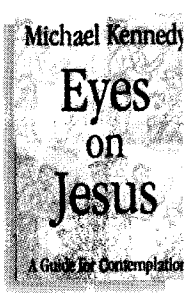

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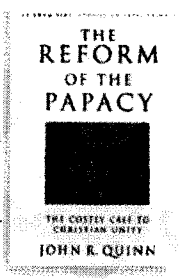

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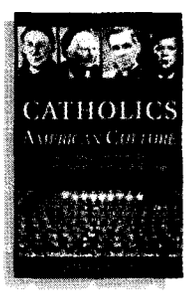

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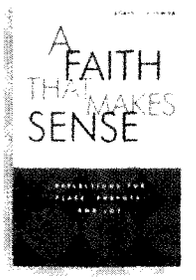

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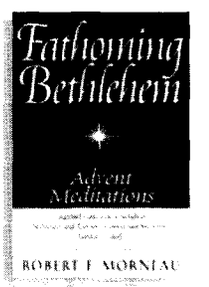

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(Continued from page 31)

representation, and participation as safeguards against arbitrary power ran up against the increasing Roman rule by monarchical fiat. Their moderation clashed with the devotional enthusiasms of the era. Their faith in freedom of inquiry could not be abandoned at the gateway to theology.

As we scarcely need *El liberalismo es pecado* to remind us, the course of liberal Catholicism never did run smooth. The famous 1864 *Syllabus of Errors* was triggered by two liberal Catholic congresses held the year before, and its sweeping final condemnation of the idea that "the Roman pontiff can and ought to reconcile and harmonize himself with progress, with liberalism, and with modern civilization" was aimed squarely at liberal Catholics. "Pernicious," "perfidious," "perverse," "a virus," Pius IX liked to term liberal Catholicism. "I have always condemned liberal Catholicism," he told a delegation of French Catholics in 1871, "and I will condemn it again forty times over if it be necessary." "Liberal Catholics are wolves in sheep's clothing, and the true priest is bound to unmask them," wrote the future Pius X when patriarch of Venice. He sounded the common theme that these people were all the more dangerous precisely because their piety, religious zeal, and charity disguised their venom.

I must admit that I still find it depressing and even embittering to reread this language. It seems insufficient consolation to realize that if the Second Vatican Council's *Declaration on Religious Liberty* and many passages from other conciliar documents had been advanced at that time, they too would have been condemned as perfidious, venomous, pernicious, contaminating, and so on. I can take only slight satisfaction in seeing that the technicalities or ambiguities then seized upon by liberal Catholics to blunt or deflect the authoritative force of the condemnations hurled their way are now seized upon by traditionalists to demonstrate that the recent teachings do not really contradict the past ones.

In any case, the story of liberal Catholicism can be charted in cycles of rise and fall, of liberal initiatives, followed by external attacks and official condemnations, followed by demoralization and fevers of psychological and ideological exacerbation within the ranks of liberal Catholics, culminating in internal disarray and dissolution. Did new movements always rise from the ashes of the old? As often as not, the ashes scattered and the new movements primarily arose, after a significant lag, from the seedbeds of conservative or reactionary milieus tilled and fertilized by new experience. Thus Lamennais and Newman began as conservatives. Then, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when new movements of Christian democracy and social Catholicism emerged in France, Italy, and Germany, they sprang not from the liberal Catholicism of 1825–65 but from intransigent forces pledged to the *Syllabus* and the restoration of the papal states and headed largely by antiliberal, paternalist, or counterrevolutionary leadership. Cut down or thinned out in the antimodernist crusade, that generation in turn was eventually succeeded by another, but it is worth remembering that a representative figure of interwar liberal Catholicism like Jacques Maritain was, to begin with, a member of the right-wing, protofascist Action Française.

But despite all these twists and turns, detours and delays, did not the story conclude with a happy ending, at Vatican II? Not quite. The terrible reality is that the successive defeats of liberal Catholicism left the church dominated by an antiliberalism that was too often vehement, apocalyptic, and brutal. The Vatican's inability to distinguish different strands of liberalism and to give a hearing even to forms advocated by its own sons and daughters set a pattern for its unnuanced hostility to all socialisms. In principle, Catholicism opposed aggressive nationalism, militarism, Darwinism, irrationalism, anti-Semitism and, above all, racist neopaganism. Yet absent a robust liberal Catholicism, in nation after nation, Catholicism either aligned itself with many of these antiliberal forces or risked their triumph rather than join hands with liberals or parliamentary socialists.

Thirty years after Vatican II, liberal Catholicism is once again passing through a cycle of official hostility and internal disarray. In a time of crisis-mongering, it is easy to exaggerate the situation. In many sectors of American Catholicism, liberal Catholicism is the dominant outlook—in the academy, in many seminaries and diocesan agencies, among religious educators and liturgists, and, on many questions, in the Catholic population generally. Are these liberal Catholic church workers, people in the trenches, as they like to say of themselves, much affected by some of the tensions and conflicts I am going to describe? Do their moods sink and their energies flag with every week's alarms sounded in the *National Catholic Reporter*? Reliable observers tell me no. Mostly they get on about their work and hope for the best.

Nonetheless, liberal Catholics have good reason to feel on the defensive and threatened from both within the church and without. Rome considers us suspect, and has been pursuing a slow but steady policy of discrediting, marginalizing, and replacing us, and now and again, where the cost appears sustainable, rooting us out. The same goal is being similarly pursued by a number of influential, well-funded movements and publications that identify themselves as "orthodox" Catholics, presumably in distinction to the rest of us who are heretics. The most obvious and fundamental working difference between these groups and liberal Catholics turns on the possibility that the pope, despite the guidance of the Holy Spirit, might be subject to tragic error. Liberal Catholics believe that this possibility, which all Catholics recognize as historical fact, did not conveniently disappear at some point in the distant past, like 1950, but was probably the case in the 1968 issuance of *Humanae vitae* and cannot be ruled out in the refusal of ordination to women.

But if liberal Catholics increasingly feel that they are not

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wanted in the church, they are hardly more welcome in the ranks of secular liberalism. American political liberalism has shifted its passion from issues of economic deprivation and concentration of power to issues of gender, sexuality, and personal choice. This shift has opened a serious philosophical chasm between liberal Catholicism and a secular liberalism that would demand an illusory stance of state neutrality, maybe even social or cultural neutrality, on all fundamental questions of lifestyle and therefore a relegation of religious claims to private life and, as Stephen Carter has argued, ultimately to trivialization.

Gaping as this chasm may appear, it is not, to my mind, an insoluble problem. That particular form of secular liberalism has produced its own generous supply of communitarian antibodies. Philosophically, liberal Catholicism has plenty of allies.

But practically and politically it is another story. Once trade unionism, regulation of the market, and various welfare measures were the litmus tests of secular liberalism. Later, desegregation and racial justice were the litmus tests. Today the litmus test is abortion, and plenty of liberal Catholics fail it. My views on *Roe* v. *Wade* are certainly less welcome in the higher circles of the *New York Times* or the New York Democratic party than my views on *Humanae vitae* are in the curia. Liberal Catholicism is increasingly homeless in American politics and culture.

This sense of being increasingly alone and unwelcome in both the church and American public life is strangely mixed with another bewildering experience. In sectors of church life such as liturgy or religious education, liberal Catholics are disconcerted to find ourselves perceived, and not without reason, as the new conservatives, defensive or even triumphal about the positions staked out over the last thirty-five years.

And this condition is further destabilized by a new development: the complicated relationship between liberal Catholicism and what is frequently labeled the Catholic left.

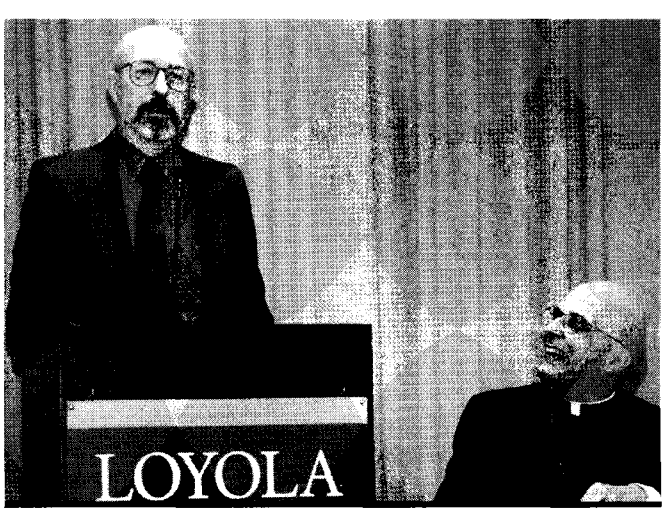
There is no way that I can move forward in these remarks without exploring some ambiguities of terminology at this point. Those ambiguities are amply illustrated by a forthcoming book from Indiana University Press, edited by Mary Jo Weaver. It is titled *What's Left?* It began as a matching volume to the one edited by Professor Weaver and Scott Appleby of Notre Dame titled *Being Right*. Originally they were to be part of a tripartite map of American Catholicism, with a third volume covering the centrists, to be called, or so it was joked, *Who Cares?* Which is perhaps not a bad title, especially if one drops the question mark and stresses the first word.

In this map, actors like *Commonweal* and *America* were evidently assigned to the center. The left seemed to run from the *National Catholic Reporter* through Call to Action to Catholics for a Free Choice. I think that is a plausible line of division, and I am not one to lose sleep about being assigned to the center, even though I understand that somewhere south of here it is said that the middle of the road is occupied only by a yellow stripe and dead armadillos. The confusion arises because the book *What's Left?* is also subtitled "Liberal American Catholics," and Professor Weaver in her introduction manages to appropriate both terms, left and liberal, in a simple two-party scheme that really leaves no way of describing, say, *Commonweal* or *America* except negatively, as neither left nor right, neither conservative nor liberal.

Interestingly, most of the book's contributors do not follow this amalgamation of left and liberal. Rather they consistently prefer "left" or "progressive." And one of them, the historian David O'Brien, explicitly and very usefully distinguishes between the Catholic left and liberal Catholicism.

The confusion here is not simply one of terminology. It is a matter of real-world ambiguity. My argument is that there is a real difference between liberal Catholicism and the Catholic left, but that many Catholics of both sorts are hard put and reluctant to acknowledge this because of shared concerns, a shared history, and the very blurry line of demarcation that in many cases exists within organizations and movements—maybe even within the hearts of individuals!—as much as between them. One consequence of this situation is that liberal Catholicism bears the burden not only of the external opposition and internal fault lines specific to itself but also those that are added because of this lack of clarity about its relationship to the Catholic left.

Some clarity could begin with Professor O'Brien's acute descriptions. Liberal Catholicism, he writes, affirmed the positive values of the culture and democratic institutions, advocated religious liberty and a vigorous lay apostolate of social reform. Its public style, which he calls "republican," stressed dialogue, mediation, compromise, and gradualism; it was incarnational more than countercultural, grounded in the lay experience of work, family, and politics. It was also rooted, I would add, in the European church's struggles with liberty, the Enlightenment, totalitarianism, and secularization that formed the background to Vatican II.



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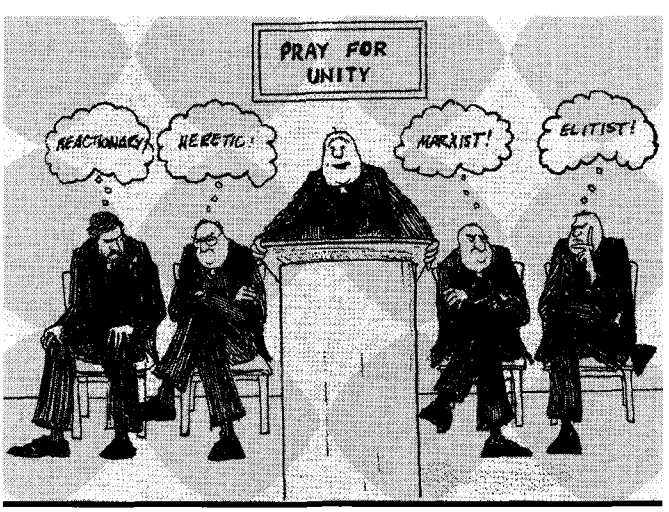
The Catholic left, O'Brien explains, was born out of liberal Catholicism but quite consciously defined itself over against it. "The use of the phrase left," he writes, "raises the question: left of what? The Catholic left emerging from the sixties had a ready answer: left of liberal Catholicism."

Race and Vietnam were the catalytic issues, and as John McGreevy has noted in his book *Parish Boundaries* (University of Chicago Press, 1996), the militant stances developed on those fronts soon worked their way into internal church conflicts. O'Brien describes the Catholic left's style as evangelical, measuring society, culture, or the church starkly against gospel standards and pressing directly to repair the resulting contrast, and with, I would add, a grudging attention to compromise, incrementalism, or extended analysis and debate. The Catholic left is an offspring of liberal Catholicism, but rooted in the dramatic appeals and confrontational styles of the 1960s and linked much more closely to third-world liberation movements than to the nineteenth- and twentieth-century European experiences. Although lay radicals have always been prominent in the leadership of the Catholic left, a major base for its activities has been members of religious orders.

O'Brien sees liberal Catholicism as feeling the effects of the shift in secular liberalism that I already described, of the conservative attack on liberal social programs, of the decline of broad-based social movements like those for peace and civil rights, of the vulnerability of the labor movement.

As for the Catholic left, O'Brien sees it suffering from the marginalization and sectarianism that he considers inherent to the evangelical style and which became more dominant as its links with liberalism were severed. The Catholic left has maintained less and less purchase on the larger public debates, and it has increasingly focused on internal church conflicts. "In public perception, the Catholic left is defined increasingly by positions on women's ordination, clerical celibacy, homosexuality, and abortion, all linked to the larger question of papal teaching authority," he writes, and this perception is amply reinforced by the volume in which his essay appears. The contributions on those topics are militant and focused, while questions of race, economics, international affairs, and general culture are dealt with diffidently or not at all.



With those distinctions in mind, much of the rest of my remarks will be directed toward the problems internal to liberal Catholicism and also to the Catholic left. These are not unrelated to the external pressures and hostility. But there is much less we can do about that. I want to organize my reflections under three headings: a crisis of irony, a crisis of intellect, and a crisis of inclusiveness. Each crisis implies a turning, a moment of decision, a choice of direction, both within each of the two camps and in their stances toward one another.

• **The Crisis of Irony.** The word, of course, stems from the Greek for "dissembling," and as a concept it entered into Western tradition largely in association with Socrates and with Plato's portrait of his mentor's feigned ignorance, self-deprecating pose, and slyly mocking praise of his interlocutors.

If I return to my faithful *American Heritage Dictionary*, "irony," I find there, is "the use of words to convey the opposite of their literal meaning," and the "incongruity between what might be expected and what actually occurs." An ironic sense, then, alerts the mind to the difference between words and meaning, between appearance and reality. Reality is never of a simple piece; it has cracks and flaws and strange twists and ambiguous shadows—all most likely where we least expect them. Irony teaches us that there are seldom gains without losses. It prepares us for what social science likes to call "unanticipated consequences" and the gap between "manifest and latent functions." The awareness of countercurrents just below the surface puts us on guard against exaggerated and one-sided enthusiasms. Irony is an equilibrating impulse.

Irony is also, like Socrates, mischievous. It pricks inflated notions and causes and persons with the knowledge that none of them are quite what they imagine themselves to be—or, more to the point, none of *us*. On the stage, the playwright's familiar stratagem of dramatic irony lets the audience in on a secret that is unknown to the characters and in fact gives to the characters' words and deeds a meaning quite different from—maybe even opposite to—the one they themselves take for granted. A sense of irony warns us that we, too, may well be in the position of those characters, playing out a script other than the one we benignly or smugly suppose.

Liberal Catholicism has not been devoid of a sense of irony. But somewhere in the passage from 1968 to 1978, in the years of Pope Paul VI after *Humanae vitae* and of Richard Nixon before and after Watergate, and somewhere in the passage from liberal Catholicism to the Catholic left, irony seemed to disappear and a rather deadly earnestness took over. Many of the new recruits to the ranks of liberal Catholi-

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cism and the Catholic left changed their thoughts but not their way of thinking. A postconciliar triumphalism too often became the order of the day, with naysayers, doubters, and skeptics dismissed, ignored, or condemned as unspeakable reactionaries. Many sixties and postsixties movements of political and personal liberation were seized upon with no more than minor reservations. New therapeutic and spiritual practices replaced old devotions with a remarkable rapidity and parallel fervor. This was also the era that inspired the now well-worn quip about the difference between a liturgist and a terrorist—that you could negotiate with a terrorist.

That wisecrack itself demonstrates that not everything escaped the ironical gaze or the skeptical comment. But that balking tended to be private and unofficial; publicly, it was muted by constant evocations of the bad old days and a fear that open criticism of others would only give ammunition to their conservative persecutors.

There are many reasons why the century now ending has been called the Age of Irony. Chief among them has been the collapse of so many utopian dreams into horrible nightmares. The war to end all wars became a bloody no man's land of trenches and the seedbed of a still greater conflict. The revolution to end all class conflict became the generator of show trials and prison camps on an unprecedented scale. Less messianic movements to redress wrongs were more successful but seldom escaped bureaucratic degeneration, squinted vision, and pitiful squabbling. There is scarcely a banner under which the nineteenth century believed the world was so proudly marching toward progress—not science, not literature, not economic growth, not capitalism, socialism, or democracy—that doesn't bear some self-inflicted stains and tatters.

Is it a lingering consequence of Catholicism's long-imposed isolation from modernity that liberal Catholicism and the Catholic left can sometimes exhibit so much innocence of this disillusioning history? It is legitimate for us to have sharpened the tools of the hermeneutic of suspicion, but we cannot wield them selectively. A sense of irony opens space for self-criticism in reviewing the results, planned and unanticipated, of postconciliar changes within the church and of the various postsixties quests for personal emancipation.

I recognize the danger in what I am saying. Genuine irony is not mockery, world-weariness, or sneering superiority à la David Letterman. Irony should not be reduced, as it often is in academia, to a reflex iconoclasm or a stylish tic. Irony should not become a way station to cynicism or nihilism. For the Christian, moreover, irony is not the ultimate attitude. We know that death and absurdity, however triumphant they may appear on every side, are not the last word. Irony simply keeps us from knowing this too easily, too facilely, because in that case we would not really know it at all.

Christians must go beyond irony, but we must pass through it, not skirt it. It is something we must share with this age, along with its joys, hopes, griefs, and anxieties.

• **The Crisis of Intellect.** A sociologist, I think, would find that Catholic intellectuals and Catholic scholars are by and large liberal or to the left. That does not mean, however, that liberal Catholicism or the Catholic left is either intellectual or scholarly. It is my impression, debatable of course, that the activism of the postconciliar period, combined with the therapeutic turn in the culture, has produced its own form of anti-intellectualism. Liberal Catholicism has not been unaffected, and the Catholic left has been especially vulnerable.

A few years ago, it was startling to compare the lists of a liberal or left publishing house like Sheed and Ward and a conservative one like Ignatius Press. The latter had its share of harsh polemics and sentimental piety but it also had a core of theological classics and current conservative scholarship. The former, while blessedly short of outright polemics and rich in a kind of popular to mid-level guide to personal spirituality, was extremely light on serious scholarship. To say these things is to immediately think of exceptions, outstanding scholarly works and vital intellectual probes by individuals associated with either liberal Catholicism or the Catholic left. Feminist theology has been extraordinarily outstanding in this regard. But I am left with the impression that, in wider circles, even this work is received and deployed in a utilitarian manner. It is not grappled with, questioned, assimilated, but cited as authority for pre-existing causes. Some people invoke the pope or Cardinal Ratzinger; other people invoke Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza or John Boswell. We want ammunition, not ideas.

The crisis of intellect, I must add, has deeper roots than anything so easy to cure as laziness or dereliction of duty. One of those roots is the valuable recognition and elevation of experience as a starting point for religious reflection—but often enough as the ending point as well. Whether the issues are those of sexual morality and family or of poverty, crime, racial inequities, economic structures, or international relations, certainly on the Catholic left and to a considerable extent within liberal Catholicism, personal experience, witness, and testimony have become the dominant mode of approaching issues. Sister Helen Prejean's *Dead Man Walking* is a superb example of this mode. In the normal run of examples, sincerity and personal sacrifice are in the foreground; systematic analysis of causes and effects, of underlying principles, of relationships to a web of other evidence, or to a heritage of theory, doctrine, and wisdom is at best implied, at worst actually derided as irrelevant abstraction.

The other root of the crisis of intellect that I would mention is the party spirit rampant not among average churchgoing Catholics but among the active and vocal elites. The work of the intellect requires a curiosity, generosity, playfulness, and candor that an atmosphere of fear and suspicion scarcely allows. In such an atmosphere, to dissent is to betray. Ideas

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are reduced to motives. Responsibility for this situation can hardly be laid at the doorstep of liberal Catholicism and the Catholic left but neither should we pretend only to be victims.

Party spirit may also be an underlying reason why liberal Catholicism has failed to match its understandable concern for preserving academic freedom in Catholic colleges and universities with any comparable passion about preserving the distinctive mission and character of these institutions as places where Catholic thought, art, literature, perspectives on society, and reflections on science could be freely pursued at a depth unlikely to occur in secular institutions.

• **The Crisis of Inclusiveness.** It may seem strange to talk about a crisis of inclusiveness. Inclusiveness is a byword of the Catholic left and certainly has good standing in liberal Catholicism. Is anyone against inclusiveness? *Could* anyone be against inclusiveness? Well, that is where the crisis is. Inclusiveness has become a cant word and, incidentally, one charged with political leverage. Judging from the book *What's Left?*, battles over who's inclusive and who isn't have haunted the internal life of many Catholic left groups. The problem is that inclusiveness is a concept that loses meaning apart from some sense of specified and bounded identity. Inclusive in what? At least among finite beings, inclusiveness implies exclusiveness. We should not be surprised when some groups flying the banner of inclusiveness are extraordinarily exclusive of those they consider insufficiently inclusive.

The Catholic left faces great challenges regarding inclusiveness. Some elements of it or closely associated with it have presented themselves explicitly as post-Christian. Other elements pretty clearly favor forms of Christianity that reject constitutive elements of Catholicism. The situation is complicated, of course, because these groups, like all others, are not necessarily stable. Leadership changes, and so do emphases and guiding statements. I remember conducting a joint interview a few years ago with two prominent members of WomenChurch. Both leaders as well as the organization are identified with the Catholic left. One, a thoroughly sophisticated theologian, described the organization in terms that were quite frankly post-Christian and involved a radical shift away from a male savior. The other described a movement that merely wanted some heightening and emphasis on feminine figures, elements, and themes well represented in the tradition. I looked from one to the other. Was this the good cop/bad cop routine? Did they hear the differences in what they were saying? I asked them, but to little avail. Similarly, when I hear a speaker on a panel at a Call to Action meeting denounce the very idea of episcopacy and the audience burst into applause: How seriously am I to take this? Does what is being said equal what is being advocated? Or is this only an expression of free-floating dissatisfaction with church authorities? How much do the Call to Action participants or organizers pay attention to these matters? Liberal Catholicism, having undergone a history of repeated condemnation, has an understandable fear of insisting on sharp boundaries. There is a decided impulse to close one's eyes to developments that may pose uncomfortable choices. Better to emphasize the good intentions and not look too closely at the details. Yet this response has seriously hampered efforts to clarify and maintain any distinctive Catholic identity. Isn't that, after all, a task we can leave to church authorities, whom we will then feel free to criticize?

This valuing of inclusiveness at the expense of identity is odd in two respects. First, it comes at a time when celebration and preservation of identity have been claimed by many oppressed groups as an aspect of human dignity. Second, it comes at a time in which Catholics no longer consign non-Catholics, theologically or socially, to some outer hell. More than that: It is commonly recognized that non-Catholic forms of Christianity and even non-Christian religions, whatever their shortcomings in the fullness of faith, may have very well kept vital, through a special emphasis, aspects of revelation that have become obscured or neglected in Catholic Christianity. Thus the Calvinist emphasis on God's sovereignty and the Word, the Lutheran emphasis on unmerited grace and the dangers of works-righteousness. The insight can be extended to aspects of Islam, Buddhism, or for that matter the Enlightenment. It is not facetious to say that they have, at times, been more Catholic than the pope. One may hope that this readiness to value what is on the other side of boundaries might relieve the pressure about indicating boundaries at all.

Liberal Catholicism and the Catholic left must reject a kind of theological promiscuity, in which anyone subject to disciplinary action by a bishop or Rome is automatically promoted to hero status and his or her work or deeds exempted from critical scrutiny. I do not think any position on church authority, sacrament, or morality should be excluded from discussion. But the discussion must be a real one in which time, knowledge, and atmosphere are sufficient to allow the explorations of those positions in relationship to the Catholic tradition in its fullness. A rally is not a discussion, and liberal theologians, scholars, and leaders obscure the difference when they lend their credentials and participation to events where a grab bag of positions claim Catholic status without engaging in that kind of conversation.

The crisis of inclusiveness will be met when liberal Catholics are unembarrassed about gently, generously, but clearly insisting on the defining marks of Catholicism, and on disciplined, respectful, learned, and prayerful discussion when questions are raised, as questions will be and should be raised, about how to understand those defining marks.

Despite my efforts to distinguish between liberal Catholicism and the Catholic left, I have spoken of these crises with rather random reference to both. Earlier I suggested that each camp would have to meet these crises in its own way and would also have to clarify and be more frank about its relationship with the other camp.

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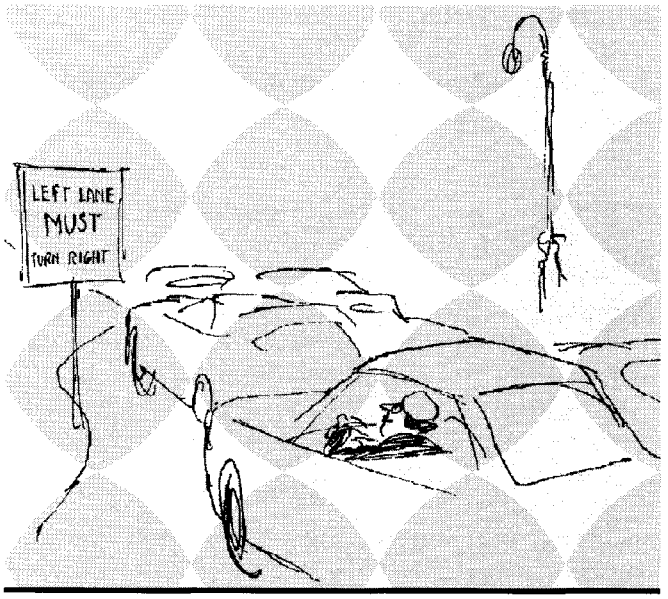
I speak of course from within liberal Catholicism, the subject of today's event. David O'Brien believes that liberal Catholicism and the Catholic left need a renewed alliance. In terms of his major concern, the social and political activism of the sort that dealt primarily with questions of economics and race, he could be right. But as O'Brien states and the book *What's Left?* amply illustrates, the Catholic left increasingly is defined by internal church questions of gender, sexuality, ecclesiology, worship, and spirituality, a near rejection of hierarchy, and a consistently political style of lobbying and mobilization organized around the demands of various special constituencies rather than by any sense of the whole. If one were to name concrete objectives—for example, regarding women in the church, collaborative decision making, a rethinking of sexuality—one might conclude that they are broadly shared by this Catholic left and liberal Catholicism. If one looks to fundamental convictions and attitudes in a larger sense, however, I believe that the gap between the camps is actually growing. In practice, many liberal Catholics recognize this and go their own way, taking much more moderate positions, but without articulating any public criticism of the Catholic left. I question whether liberal Catholicism can maintain this discreet silence. One turning point, one decision, nestled in the three I have described, involves liberal Catholicism's willingness not only to criticize itself but forthrightly to call the Catholic left to account.

I am not discouraged about these crises internal to liberal Catholicism. Already I see a greater willingness to acknowledge the ironies of postconciliar developments. The welcome given to Charles Morris's *American Catholic* (Times Books, 1997), an account of the dramatic past and stormy present of the American church that decidedly escaped party lines. *Saying Amen: A Mystagogy of the Sacraments* (Liturgy Training Publications, 1999), Kathleen Hughes's recent book on the liturgy, excerpted in *Church* magazine, is both serene and unblinking in setting forth many of the unanticipated twists and turns of liturgical renewal. There are any number of initiatives on the intellectual and scholarly front: journals, conferences (most of which appear to feature Cardinal George), new institutes, Catholic studies programs, publishing efforts. Much of this energy could be diverted into squabbling and bitterness provoked by a heavy-handed or hypocritical resolution of the debate about implementing *Ex corde ecclesiae*, but I pray that won't occur. About the question of inclusiveness I feel less certain. It is on the one hand fundamental and on the other the most wrenching of close ties and solidarities.

Why does it matter? Not long ago I came across some notes from an interview I had with Gustavo Gutiérrez, usually viewed as the founding father of liberation theology. "I don't believe in liberation theology," Father Gutiérrez said. "I believe in Jesus Christ." Let me take my cue from him. I don't believe in liberal Catholicism. I believe in Jesus Christ, and I believe in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.



But I would argue that insofar as we can humanly tell, liberal Catholicism is essential to the flourishing of that church in the United States and, I believe, in the rest of the world. I don't deny the need for currents in the church that emphasize preservation and the risks of change or currents of either right or left that call for prophetic confrontation and sectarian witness. But if the church is to remain a healthy organism it needs the self-criticism, open inquiry, and spirit of dialogue that liberal Catholicism has provided.

What are some of the developments the church must address in the new millennium?

- The world-historical change in control of fertility and in the relations between men and women and in the meaning of both sexuality and the inherited language and imagery of religion.
- The extension of scientific knowledge and technological control over genes and the mind.
- Entirely new relations between world religions.
- The modern quantum leap in historical consciousness and cultural pluralism.
- A worldwide revolution of individual freedom and democracy.

Will Catholic Christianity persuade the world that the key to making these developments serve life rather than death is the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ and the sacramental life of the Spirit lived in the community of his disciples? Not from behind barred gates or armed ramparts. Not from a stance that refuses to acknowledge change, that tries to evade historical consciousness, that pits itself against pluralism, freedom, and democracy. If, once again, there is no liberal Catholicism, due to hierarchical repression, internal disintegration, or the combination of both, we will undoubtedly, as so often before and at such a high price, reinvent it. □

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John Noonan

Liberalism Doesn't Exist

But liberals do

I'd like to begin with the proposition, error has no rights. That is a proposition I take to be indisputable. It's the beginning of a major syllogism. And it is the major syllogism that sustained religious persecution from about 320 A.D. into the twentieth century, or at least the rightness of religious persecution.

It's an indisputable proposition. What's wrong with it?

What's wrong with it is: It personifies error. It supposes there is such a thing, such a person, as error, who might go around having rights. As the Marxists might have said, it reifies error, turning it into a thing. We might say it personifies error. I believe the same fundamental fallacy that underlies that proposition underlies talk of liberalism. It's reified, it's personified, it's given this or that virtue or vice. I don't believe it exists. I believe there are ideas, but the ideas reside in individual human beings.

Now, if I may strike at a root conception, which I think may appear in various forms in both of the presenters' papers, I don't believe in the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment is a chronological era, quite comparable to the Dark Ages. No respectable historian now believes there was such a times as when the lights went out and it was dark. I think in time it will be seen that there's no such period as when the lights went on.

What gives me great support is the work of a careful American historian, Henry May, in a 1978 book called *The Enlightenment in America*. He defines the Enlightenment with great strain as embracing two propositions. First, the present generation knows more than the past generation, and, second, human reason is a good thing. If those two propositions are all the Enlightenment boils down to, I would maintain that there is no enlightenment. May has great difficulty locating anybody in eighteenth-century America who can be genuinely put into the conventional caricature of the Enlightenment. You find the Enlightenment embracing persons ranging from John Locke, a very pious Protestant theologian, to Voltaire, a totally irreverent and cynical ex-Catholic. I heard a distinguished mathematician not so long ago begin the Enlightenment with Francis Bacon, in the age of Shakespeare.

I think, myself, that the Enlightenment is a reified or personified concept that modern secularists love because they want some intellectual ancestry, and they've invented the Enlightenment as the period. But I don't feel it exists.

I feel the same way about liberalism. If you try to locate some set of ideas, they're pretty incoherent. In the nineteenth century, secular liberalism put much stress on economic freedom. It was somehow connected with the Whigs in England. It stressed some government liberties but a lot of social repression. It was pretty much tied to Victorian morals.

As the same word evolved in this century, it came to cover people who believe in active government. The liberals were in FDR's New Deal, so there had to be a great deal of government control. Eventually, as the term is used today, it applies mostly in secular terms to freedom from sexual restraints.

It's an incoherent term. I think that the same thing is true when it's moved over to the religious sphere and Catholic liberalism is spoken about. If it is moved left, as Peter suggests, then you get people who are so ardent in their desire to help the poor that they favor a heavy amount of state action. That's just the opposite of earlier views. It's an unstable concept and I think on the whole an unfortunate one.

If you look at persons and don't try to personify an idea, you get people, as both speakers have suggested, like Lacordaire and Lamennais. Lamennais, with his journal, *L'Avenir* (*The Future*), looked to a democratic society with a certain freedom of conscience, and left the church because his ideas were explicitly condemned by Gregory XVI. You have Lacordaire, his associate to some degree, going on to become a Dominican and restore the Dominican order in France. These were two very different persons in their relations to the church. You can't sum them up neatly and say that both were Catholic liberals in the nineteenth century.

The greatest paradox of all, I think, is someone that Cardinal George takes as a counselor and the present pope has spoken of in the highest terms, John Henry Newman. Newman, to his critics in England, to people like Ward and Manning, was a liberal. He was a dangerous liberal. Certainly for many of the people in Rome he was a dangerous liberal. He, himself, used that wonderfully modern term, bureaucrats, to describe the Roman curia.

If you read Ian Ker's remarkable biography of Newman, you can get that quotation about the bureaucrats in Rome. He was a liberal to them. But only a few years after, per-

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haps only two years after Peter Steinfels's quotation from Pius IX on fighting liberalism, Leo XIII made Newman a cardinal, his first cardinal. Leo XIII did not see him as a liberal. Again the attempt to catalog, to produce an artificial synthesis, is a mistake.

There are other ways you can look at people within the church. If you draw on Alasdair MacIntyre, you can talk of people being organization-centered or task-centered. You absolutely won't get the task done unless you have an organization; there's no point to the organization unless you have a task to perform. There is a third element that can never be forgotten. You must be people-oriented. Both task-oriented persons and organization-oriented persons will not do anything good unless they are also people-oriented. The church embraces all three in various degrees. But you could divide the church by those categories.

Another distinction is between the literalists and the non-literalists. I make the contrast between the spirit and the letter. Very few Catholics are literalists the way biblical fundamentalists are literalists. Quite a few Catholics are literalists about papal encyclicals. They will take a single sentence, a single phrase, out of a papal encyclical, in a way that they would consider ridiculous if it were taken out of Holy Scripture. But they will use that single sentence as though it was determinative of an issue. Then there are those who have slogans, and they use those slogans the way literalists, papal literalists, use a single sentence from a papal encyclical. So you could divide the church that way, if you wanted to.

I think driving all people throughout is the search for certainty. What's uniting them is a search for certainty. We all want the repose of the human mind in certainty. There isn't much repose to be achieved. But the search for it is one we can all sympathize with because we all share it. We have to balance that search for certainty with the necessity of freedom for attaining and continuing to adhere to the truth.

Now, that is one of the great lines of *Dignitatis humanae*, the teaching of the Second Vatican Council on religious freedom: that the truth which human beings must have about their relation to God cannot be achieved without immunity, as the council puts it, from psychological coercion. That gives a whole agenda for the future of Catholic education, which I suspect has not been realized to any degree. I hope that that is an agenda we would all agree on.

I end with the same thought that I think Cardinal George echoed and that Peter Steinfels referred to, the thought that Paul expresses in his first letter to the Corinthians, when he deplores the division of the church at Corinth into parties, the party of Paul, the party of Apollos, the party of Cephas. You are none of those, he says. You are Christ's. I believe that is the proper approach to the church. □

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John T. McGreevy

An Exhausted Project?

Not if history is any judge

Place yourself, if you can, at that most revealing late twentieth-century event—one sure to interest late twenty-first-century historians—a Catholic marriage preparation weekend. You and your fiancée are one of twenty-five couples attending a series of sessions directed by the parish priest, a female pastoral associate, and several couples from the diocese.

You know that it is a Catholic event because at first the microphone does not work. You also come to realize, at the coffee break after the first session, that half of the participants have never spoken to a priest or nun. Most have not attended Catholic schools and many have dreaded this weekend from the moment they agreed to attend. Several of the couples are living together. Almost all have friends raised Catholic but who decided that a Catholic wedding wasn't worth the bother.

And yet the weekend is a success. The priest and the pastoral associate offer thoughtful reflections on the theology of marriage. A hush descends over the room as married couples discuss various challenges: conflicts over money, children, jobs, in-laws. You notice that the questions from the engaged couples become painfully earnest, suggesting a deep desire to build successful marriages in a culture where the barriers to this accomplishment seem formidable. Words like commitment and permanence fly across the room, absent the ironic scare quotes.

A discordant note, however, is struck by a couple specifically invited to present information on natural family planning. The questions from the engaged couples turn from earnest to incredulous, and the women, in particular, wonder out loud whether natural family planning will prevent them from finding fulfilling work outside the home, or doom them to a permanent role as a sexual policewoman in the marital household. They ask why only Catholics seem to find artificial birth control troubling, and why women have no role in the formulation of Catholic teaching on such an intimate matter.

I offer this composite anecdote, culled from my own experience and accounts given to me by friends, simply to flesh out the issues in today's discussion. The terms liberalism and liberal Catholicism are abstract, and definitions are as diverse as today's commentators. But the general issues presented by today's session are clear: First, how to sustain and nurture a Catholicism rightly in opposition to aspects of contemporary culture—a Catholicism, for example, that understands marriage as something more than contract. And second, what role can or should that loose body of critics and criticism we call Catholic liberalism play in this process?

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Or, more directly, can we understand questions about birth control as something more than a craven acquiescence to secular culture?

Both Cardinal George and Peter Steinfels have rightly identified a central task of the current moment, to transmit and elucidate what Cardinal George calls "simply Catholicism," and what Peter Steinfels refers to as "defining marks" for Catholic people and institutions. At the same time, neither speaker wants what Steinfels terms "barred gates and armed ramparts" and what George identifies as a church so "obsessed with particular practices and so sectarian in its outlook that it cannot serve as a sign of unity of all peoples in Christ."

It's striking that both speakers turn to history to defend their position, and I would shame my craft if I failed to do the same. The first observation I would make is to highlight the individualistic character of American liberalism. Cardinal George rightly sees Catholic hostility to the broad idea of liberalism as stemming from the French Revolution. In France and much of Europe an embattled Catholicism successfully revived itself from the chaos and persecution of the 1790s, but not without fierce struggles over the formal relationship between church and state.

But the American situation was different. Catholic leaders in the United States were incomparably more enthusiastic about the American Revolution than its French successor, and Catholic leaders routinely endorsed the ordered liberty of the American Constitution.

What drew the fiercest American Catholic attacks in the mid-nineteenth century was not the Enlightenment (I use the term advisedly) liberalism of James Madison. Instead it was reform-oriented liberalism springing primarily from the left wing of American Protestantism. These reformers—ranging from William Lloyd Garrison to Theodore Parker and Harriet Beecher Stowe—promoted utopian communities, urged temperance regulations, and favored the liberalization of American divorce laws.

At the heart of these reforms in the nineteenth century was a novel and in some ways distinctly American emphasis on individual autonomy. In part for this reason, many mid-nineteenth-century reformers, including Parker, Stowe, and Garrison, possessed a powerful streak of anti-Catholicism, again something not characteristic of George Washington and James Madison. The great liberal, Theodore Parker, snarled in 1854, "The Catholic worshiper is not to think but to believe and obey; the priest not to reason and consider, but to proclaim and command. The Catholic voter is not to inquire and examine, but to deposit his ballot as the ecclesiastical authority directs...."

"Eighteenth-century enlightenment, nineteenth-century enlightenment, as long as it's enlightenment!"

Nonetheless, these same often anti-Catholic reformers also spearheaded the extraordinary nineteenth-century campaign against slavery, propelled by the same belief in human autonomy that fueled their other crusades. The campaign against slavery began with British evangelicals in the early part of the 1800s and swept across Latin America and then the United States. Catholic intellectuals and bishops almost never defended slavery, but they did not, by and large, participate in the movement for its abolition. Instead they emphasized that all humans endured suffering, and that the goal of overthrowing the slave system should not outweigh a fear of social disorder. And Catholics tended to lump the abolition of slavery with what they rightly understood as a broader anti-authoritarianism in liberal Protestantism.

This general Catholic resistance to abolition furthered tensions between liberals and Catholics. Again, Theodore Parker: "The Catholic clergy and people are on the side of slavery. It is an institution thoroughly congenial to them. Consider the first principles of their church. I am told there's not in all America a single Catholic newspaper hostile to slavery...."

Parker was not quite correct. A few American Catholics favored abolition, especially after the beginning of the Civil War, and so did a small number of European Catholics. But these Catholics typically came from the liberal wing of American and European Catholicism, and we can understand their support for the abolition of slavery as only one component of a broader struggle for freedom for and within the church. The most single famous speech by a nineteenth-century Catholic liberal remains the 1863 plea of Charles Montalembert for the separation of church and state. Pius IX, as Peter Steinfels pointed out, responded with the 1864 *Syllabus of Errors*. At exactly the same time, Montalembert complained of an authoritarian Vatican squelching honest debate, and regretted that so few American Catholics had placed themselves on the side of freedom in the abolition debate.

My larger point is this: At its best, as in the slavery debate, liberal Catholicism helped the wider church identify what Charles Taylor refers to as "extensions of a gospel ethic" with weak Catholic roots. Catholic abolitionists, attacked at the time by moral theologians and bishops, helped the church recognize and assimilate one of liberalism's great achievements. And inevitably questions about freedom in the larger society evolved into discussions of freedom within the church.

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Of course the reverse—Catholicism offering wisdom to American liberalism—was true then and is perhaps even more true today. In the early twentieth century, the Catholic emphasis on marriage and the family highlighted by Cardinal George prevented Catholic intellectuals from endorsing the eugenics movement, a cause then dear to liberals throughout the North Atlantic. Today a wide range of Catholic and non-Catholic thinkers draw upon notions of subsidiarity as they contemplate the role of local institutions in American society. And the defense of human life made by bishops and Catholic scholars has become the most compelling alternative to the pieties of the *New York Times*.

Our two main speakers, however, disagree on liberal Catholicism's current ability to assist the wider church. For Cardinal George, liberal Catholicism is an "exhausted project," once "necessary," but "problematic" in the context of the last thirty years. In particular, liberal Catholicism's "excessive preoccupation with the church's visible government" makes it less relevant to challenges posed by a public culture ordered around false notions of autonomy and human fulfillment. Peter Steinfels draws a different moral, urging Catholic leaders not to ignore the ability of the liberal Catholic tradition to discern an authentically Christian message, even if that message is temporarily lodged outside Catholicism.

My own view on this particular question is closer to that of Peter Steinfels. After all, no one in 1790 could have predicted that slavery would seem a moral outrage to almost all thoughtful people in 1870. Similarly, no one in 1920 could have predicted the vastly more complicated role of American women in contemporary society. These complications include the decline in fertility and increased women's education throughout the world; the desire of women for more fulfilling work, especially when fewer years are spent raising children; and the emergence of women as leaders in almost every realm of our society.

We're still living through that particular shift, but it's painfully clear that Catholic leaders have not articulated a broadly persuasive vision of women's roles within and without the church. Again, caution is important. Just as Catholics were correct to reject the radical anti-authoritarianism of some antislavery advocates in the nineteenth century, Catholics have not and should not have accepted all that goes under the name of women's rights in the late twentieth-century United States. And Cardinal George is absolutely correct to note that Catholic structures need not mimic the forms of democratic government. But denunciations of feminism miss the humane impulse toward an enhanced dignity for women that marks the last thirty years. And the current effort to silence discussion on women's authority within the church, in my judgment, is the least effective response to a society in flux.

That said, Catholic liberals need to confront Cardinal George's most telling, even painful, observation. That is, does liberal Catholicism result in a church with "nothing original to contribute to the world's self-understanding"? Or, more bluntly, can Catholic liberals, *Commonweal* subscribers, reproduce themselves? The marriage preparation weekend I described at the beginning of my remarks certainly highlights an ongoing, agonizing tension about Catholic teaching on birth control. But the weekend can also have a startlingly positive effect because it is the first time that couples under forty have heard anything of intellectual seriousness about Catholicism, anything more serious, that is, than the balloons that decorated their childhood CCD books. The paucity of our Catholic theological vocabulary also becomes evident in conversation with, say, the campus minister, who preaches openness and participation, but worries in private that student faith will not survive the cocoon of the dormitory; or in the observations of the Catholic conservative who thrives on ahistorical defenses of each papal action and, when those defenses fail, on accusations of heresy.

This task of Catholic formation requires much from conservatives and liberals alike. We might encourage sustained attention to church history and theology in educational settings, less sentimental preaching, and the reading of magazines like *Commonweal*. And the problem of inadequate theological formation is, of course, tightly linked to the polarization of Catholic debate on a variety of issues, the inability to use tradition creatively to resolve Catholic versions of the culture wars. It's a broader question, actually, of how to sustain religious traditions in a mobile, less familial society. If you don't believe me, talk to Latinos concerned about Catholicism's fate in a modernizing San Salvador or Los Angeles. Or pick up almost any Jewish periodical and read about a rush to sectarianism by a small group for whom tradition becomes lock step, and a much larger group afflicted by theological amnesia. Or ask mainline Protestants about the relationship of theological liberalism and denominational health.

Historians are poor prognosticators. So I would decline to forecast liberal Catholicism's future. The last professional historian to run for president, George McGovern, saw relatively few predictions come to fruition. But it is difficult to imagine a Catholic renaissance in terms of devotion and intellectual life comparable to that of the nineteenth century unless both problems—the inadequacy of the Catholic response to societal change and the weakness of Catholic formation—are addressed. Deeper engagement must proceed apace with respect for the best expressions of contemporary culture, a discernment of gold from dross. If liberal Catholicism can assist in this vital task, and I think it is our best hope, then all Catholics, not just liberals, should wish for its continued good health. □

John T. McGreevy *is professor of history at the University of Notre Dame, and the author of* Parish Boundaries *(University of Chicago Press).*

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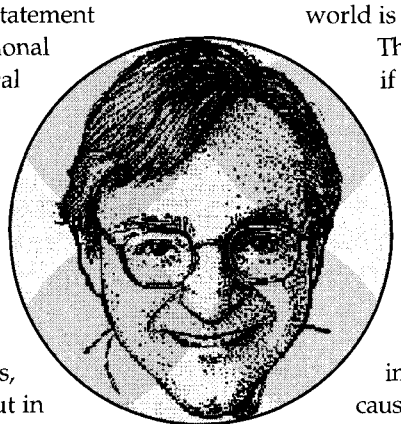
E.J. Dionne, Jr.

We're All Liberals Now

Even the pope

First of all, I think we might imagine today's event as a three-hour rebuttal to Governor Jesse Ventura and his claim that participants in organized religion are weak-minded. I wish he were here with us today. I think he might come to realize that his description of religion as a crutch has it exactly backwards. Faith is more challenge than crutch, an intellectual provocation.

I have been accused of being a feliciopath. I think it is meant as a compliment. But I would define it here clinically as the delusion of seeing good where it manifestly doesn't exist, or seeing concord where there's nothing but disagreement. I want to live up to that charge by arguing that liberal Catholicism is in crisis, but is everywhere triumphant. As Henry Kissinger once said in another context, that statement is not only provocative, but it has the additional virtue of being true. Far from being parasitical on Catholicism, liberal Catholicism provides the basis for many of the most significant triumphs of John Paul's papacy.



But how could one possibly believe that liberal Catholicism is triumphant? How could one believe that it lays the basis for John Paul's achievements?

Consider that the fundamental change brought about in the church by Vatican II was, I think, in historical terms not in liturgy, but in the church's relationship with the modern world, and in particular its stance toward the ideas of democracy and religious liberty. Peter Steinfels's invocation of those words, "perfidious," "venomous," "pernicious," and "contaminating," as reflecting the church's old attitude toward liberalism, tolerance, and democracy, reminds us of something that many of us Catholics don't like to think about, that this transformation was hard-won and that it marked a very large break with the church's preconciliar position, especially its position after the First Vatican Council.

This great transformation was inspired by the church's dialogue with modernity. One of the most significant aspects of John Paul's papacy is that he did not reverse this historic change. On the contrary, he confirmed it. If any idea has dominated his pontificate, it is the idea of the dignity of every human person. This notion has undergirded his campaign for human rights around the world. It has given substance to his campaign for social justice and the rights of workers, and to his battle for religious liberty. It impelled him to visit that Roman synagogue and to denounce anti-Semitism, a curse and a sin that afflicted so many in our church and at times, the institution itself.

Now, these are, I believe, fundamentally liberal achievements, or at least they are achievements of a Catholicism and a Christianity in dialogue with liberalism. They are rooted in an interpretation of the church's traditions that would have been simply impossible absent the rise of liberalism and its influence on the church. You could say they might not have been possible had God not sent us John Courtney Murray, had John Courtney Murray not grown up in America, and had John Courtney Murray not persuaded Rome to take the church's experience in our country seriously.

Cardinal George described very well the standard critique of a certain liberal interpretation of Vatican II as the belief that the world sets the agenda for the church. Certainly there were times when this seemed to be true. But I don't think this is a fair view of what liberal Catholicism was, or, for that matter, what it still is. In fact, I think that in the broad terrain which one could describe as both liberal and left Catholic—and I appreciate Peter's distinction between the two—it is often the case that the liberal Catholic stance toward the world is critical rather than overly accepting.

This liberalized Catholicism that we have today, if I may call it that, is destined to remain triumphant for the foreseeable future, not only because this decisive historical shift was confirmed by a pope who is seen as conservative (I think he's more complicated than that), but because the historical situation of the church requires it. This is something that John Paul knows and has spoken about.

Freedom of conscience is of particular importance always to those whose consciences cause them to dissent from the predominant view of a society. It is no accident that the strongest voices for religious liberty inside the church came from America and also from Australia and Britain and Canada. It's not simply that we were all influenced in these countries by Protestantism. (Chesterton once said that in America even Catholics are Protestant—a view that I found quite popular in the Vatican when I covered it some years ago.) More important, it is because we were a minority church struggling for our legal rights, and then for acceptance in the broader culture.

That is now the position of the Catholic church in the world at large. We Catholics are certainly a large minority in the world. Some would say we are a powerful minority. But we are a minority, nonetheless. The church thus depends on liberalism's promise of religious liberty more than ever in its history. It is always helpful when high principle is reinforced by self-interest, and that is the case today with the cause of religious liberty.

Liberal Catholicism, as Peter reminded us, was also distinctive for its attitude toward modernity. It insisted, as he said, "on distinctions and nuance in evaluating modernity rather than sweeping condemnations." Is there any better description of the church's relationship to modernity right

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now than that one? The church's stance, you might say, is one of dialectical engagement.

James Hitchcock, the Catholic historian, once spoke of the battle of modernity as involving a choice between confrontation and capitulation. I don't think those are the only options. A better description of what is now happening, and, yes, under John Paul's papacy, is what you might call a program of critical engagement. I know very few Catholics (even, I suspect, Hitchcock), who in fact want to roll back modernity and all of its achievements. The church has been too much affected by modernity—in so many cases, as in the area of democracy and religious liberty, for the better—to be complicit in that sort of project.

But let there be no question that the issue here is indeed one of critical engagement, and that is why I see liberal Catholicism as being stronger in the broader culture than Peter does, even though he is right on many of the particulars that he describes. I think liberal Catholicism is providing answers that many people are looking for.

The political theorist Amy Guttman once said that those who call themselves communitarian want to live in Salem but not believe in witches. It seems to me that contemporary Catholicism, strongly influenced but not overwhelmed by its engagement with liberalism, is trying to work out how you can build a free, communitarian democracy while dispensing with witches. I think it's a task for which the Catholic church is uniquely well placed.

As just one example of the increasing attractiveness of Catholic tradition in our culture, I'd cite Robert Bellah's article last July in *America*, *Commonweal*'s friendly competitor. Bellah argues that the Catholic emphasis on the importance of solidarity and the common good is a necessary corrective to the Protestant emphasis on individualism.

We're here in Chicago, so I feel obligated to cite Bellah's reference to Andrew Greeley. Father Greeley wrote that the Catholic "tends to see society as a 'sacrament' of God, a set of ordered relationships governed by both justice and love, that reveal, however imperfectly, the presence of God. Society is 'natural' and 'good' therefore, for humans and their natural response to God is social. The Protestant tends to see society as God-forsaken and therefore unnatural and oppressive. The individual stands over against society and not integrated into it." Greeley goes on, "The human becomes fully human only when he is able to break away from social oppression and relate to the absent God as a completely free individual."

Bellah remarks that this is not entirely fair to Protestantism, since "it overlooks the community-forming capacity of Protestantism, so evident earlier in our history." But, he adds, it "does help us understand Margaret Thatcher's otherwise unintelligible remark, 'There is no such thing as society,' a quintessentially Protestant thing to say."

It seems to me that communitarianism as an idea is liberalism's acknowledgment of the limits of radical individualism. An extreme individualism does not, cannot, by itself create the social basis for liberty. There is such a thing as society, and its health, its attention to fairness and justice, determines whether or not the dignity of the individual human person is upheld. Catholicism, precisely because of its often stormy but highly productive dialogue with liberalism, is now uniquely well placed to engage free societies on their obligation to create the solidarity that is liberty's indispensable ally.

I have pointedly avoided some of the problems liberal Catholicism confronts, especially inside the church at this moment. But I want to underscore a point that Peter made, because I think it's very important. He said he would argue that "insofar as we can humanly tell, liberal Catholicism is essential to the flourishing of the church in the United States, and, I believe, in the rest of the world."

The church, he goes on, if it's to remain a healthy organism, needs the self-criticism, open inquiry, and spirit of dialogue that liberal Catholicism has provided. I believe that is true, and I am fearful of a tendency I see among some Catholics who call themselves traditional or orthodox to engage in what you might call planned shrinkage of the church, to insist that those of us who so strongly identify with its traditions, who are not grab-bag Catholics, who do worry about fidelity should be cast as people who are really Protestants and should go off and join the churches where we are told we belong by those who think the church should be smaller.

I for one will not deny for a moment Protestantism's influence on me as an American Catholic, or my debt to it. But I believe that emptying our pews of those who stand in the liberal Catholic tradition, who may conscientiously dissent on matters such as contraception or priestly celibacy or the role of women in the church, would be catastrophic for both the church and the world. It would turn the church that calls itself Catholic and universal into precisely the kind of sect that Cardinal George rightly worries that some would create, and it would rob us of the great opportunity that lies ahead.

In the belief that some misunderstand where the liberal Catholic tradition moves people, I'd like to close with the words of Father Bryan Hehir, who is not himself a feliciopath, but always manages to bring my spirits up. Father Hehir wrote that if you accept the institution seriously—he's talking about our church—you'll experience it as both a blessing and a burden. There are times when the institution bears down upon you. There are times when it sets limits on what you think most needs to be done. There are other times when you are deeply grateful that it has survived two thousand years and that it is present in an institutional form in a world that is tough to change.

I believe that our faith teaches us that, and I believe that is our hope. □

E.J. Dionne, Jr., *syndicated* Washington Post *columnist, is the author of* Why Americans Hate Politics *(Simon & Schuster).*

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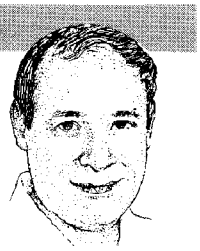
Richard Alleva



A CRITIC'S MANIFESTO

Why I saw it, why I didn't

TV programs such as "Entertainment Tonight" offer to take you "behind the scenes" and show you how a movie is shot. For *Commonweal*'s seventy-fifth anniversary, and in anticipation of my tenth year as its film critic, I'd like to take my readers a bit behind the scenes of my reviews. This, I hope, will give you a sense of the place movies occupy in today's culture, of the current importance and unimportance of film criticism, and, finally, of the specialness of writing for this magazine.

Clearly, I don't review the majority of released movies, for that's impossible to do in depth for any biweekly in which space is at a premium. So, how do I choose?

Each film I write about must fall into at least one of three categories: (1) a much discussed work (*Schindler's List*, *Titanic*) which can't be overlooked without ignoring what's happening in the culture at large; (2) relatively unpublicized films of quality that should be brought to the reader's attention (*The Rapture*, *Citizen Ruth*); (3) movies that deal directly with religious matters and/or institutions (*Priest*, *Entertaining Angels*). Films that can brace the spirit often fall into more than one category. Many popular movies don't fall into even the first category because, though they're well attended, there's nothing in them that can be discussed even by the teen-agers who have made their success. The current hit, *Blue Streak*, is an instance of this. What's to talk about?

Trying to be faithful to these criteria, I've goofed time and again. If only I had reviewed *Braveheart*, which, when I finally caught it on video, surprised me as being not only an Oscar-winning blockbuster but a pretty good movie with an emotional kick. And why did I overlook that grime-encrusted gem, *One False Move*, the best melodrama of the last two decades, and one with some spiritual import as well? Worse still, I failed to write about *Breaking the Waves*, a troubling, flawed movie but one that featured not only an unforgettable performance by Emily Watson but some real insight into organized religion's perennial trouble with ecstatics who also seem to be heretics?

Even though I did review most of each year's major films, readers may have noticed that my reviews have appeared erratically in relation to the time of a movie's release date. Why did my reviews of *The Red Violin* and *Shine* appear as soon as those movies were released while the *Titanic* and *Amistad* notices appeared more than a month after their openings?

This brings us right to the question of the function of the movie critic but this entails the even larger subject of the state of the American movie industry. And the larger subject must come first.

There are, broadly speaking, two types of movies nowadays: big-studio movies and less expensive ones made with independent financing (though often released by a major studio when the finished product smells successful). The studio-made jobs (*Titanic*) cost a gazillion dollars and must "open big," that is, make millions of dollars in their first two weeks if it is to prove financially worthwhile to keep them in wide distribution all over the country (advertising and the manufacture of prints are expensive). Therefore, the publicity machines are cranked up weeks in advance in hope that the resulting "buzz" will be heard by the customers. Though the critics on television, major newspapers, and popular magazines are part of this machinery if their reviews yield exciting quotes, the reviewers of intellectual periodicals are not.

Teen-agers, who make up a huge portion of the audience, are not about to listen to the likes of Stanley Kauffmann (*The New Republic*), John Simon (*The National Review*), David Denby (*The New Yorker*), or myself. Therefore we queue up with the public right after the blockbuster opens. Since I take a week to think and write about each film, my review buzzes through *Commonweal*'s fax machine about two weeks after the opening (sometimes later, if two or three films are released the same weekend). But since the deadline for the review precedes the magazine's actual arrival in your mailbox by nearly a month, you can understand the frequent tardiness of my reviews.

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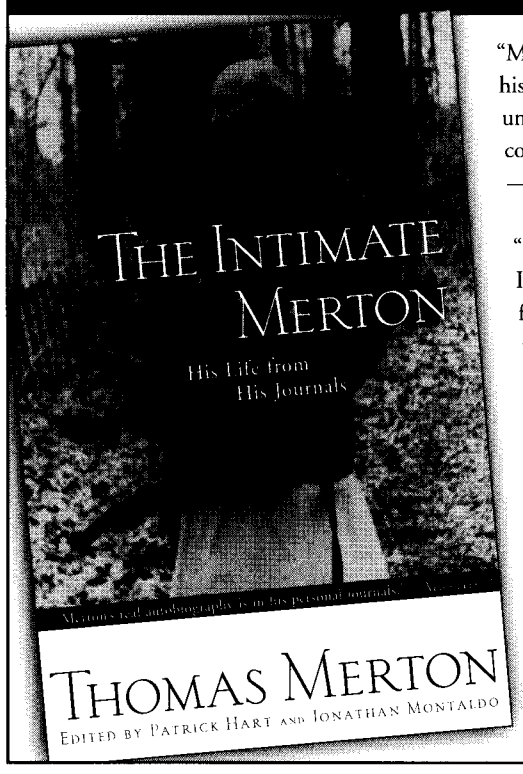
On the other hand, independently made American films (*Citizen Ruth*) and independently released foreign jobs (*Shine*) are often greatly helped by critical favor. So distributors invite critics to private prerelease screenings often as much as three months before the opening. (Robert Duvall hadn't even finished editing *The Apostle* when I saw it.) Therefore, my reviews of these films appear close to release time or even well in advance.

Any irritation this causes the critic is beside the point. What matters is what the current situation reveals about the movie culture of today, especially as compared with the situation of thirty and forty years ago.

From the late fifties till the mid-seventies, great works by Fellini, Antonioni, Bergman, and Kurosawa, along with certain uncommercial American efforts (*Shadows, Nothing but a Man*) played the art-house circuit. By the mid-sixties, their audiences were large and enthusiastic. And the critics addressing them (Pauline Kael, Stanley Kauffmann, Dwight Macdonald, Andrew Sarris, John Simon, Parker Tyler) had such a sizable following that they were frequently invited to be on talk shows with Dick Cavett, David Susskind, and David Frost, thereby obtaining even larger audiences for both their writings and the movies written about.

The usual demographics became confounded (exactly what should happen to demographics). My father, a truck driver who never finished high school, took me to showings of *8 1/2, Sundays and Cybelle, The Seventh Seal,* and *Divorce, Italian Style* at the Lincoln Theater in New Haven, and knew some of the works of Fellini and Bergman as well as many professors did. His favorite actor was Marcello Mastroianni, and he raved about the beauty of Catherine Deneuve in *Belle de Jour*. This was not cultural social climbing but direct, honest appreciation of the real fun that was in these movies: their lithe storytelling, their (then) daring frankness about sex, their often explosive humor, deeply felt passion, and the fact that their staging and photography were completely lacking in the high-priced ponderousness and flabbiness that then filled American

"Merton's Real Autobiography"



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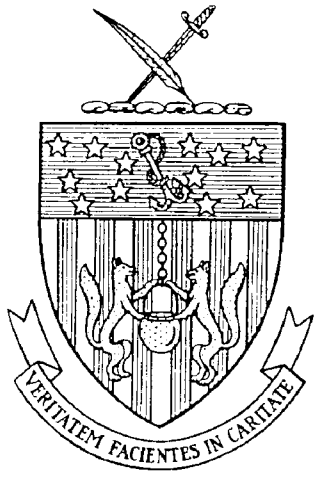

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screens. (There was also the travelogue factor: He got to see much of Europe secondhand.)

"Arty" usually means pretentious, precious, and highbrow in the worst sense. But these "arty" movies of the late fifties and sixties were almost mainstream entertainment, so much delight did they give to a relatively large number of people. Like the novels of Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Faulkner, Willa Cather, and Edith Wharton in an earlier era, here was high art that reached the greater American public. As in all healthy artistic eras, the general public and the intellectually privileged were looking at the same things.

Today, I open the entertainment section of the newspaper and run my eyes down the list of thirteen films at the nearby multiplex that exhibits nothing but big-studio releases. Out of the thirteen, three—*Bowfinger, Mumford, The Sixth Sense*—are certainly worth reviewing, the first two being comedies with attractively eccentric premises, bright scripts, and good casts, and the third (which I've already reviewed) a horror movie with a familiar situation (ghosts frighten child) that is freshened and subtilized by brilliant filmmaking and an amazing performance by the child lead. The ten others are assembly-line jobs that you've seen before even if you haven't seen them before: male models pretending to be actors aspiring to be action heroes; monster sharks, monster bats, monster teen-agers; bedeviled women exorcised by priests with sensitively Celtic profiles; cagy black scam artists not always played by Eddie Murphy.

Over at the local "quality" theater, there are five independently made and distributed features. Two of them are gay comedies about young people coming out of the closet and sending their stuffy and sexually repressed parents into tailspins. There are, by my most conservative estimate, 947 of these gay-pride movies made every year, and I can't think of a genre that has become so cliché-ridden in so short a time. Also on view are *My Life So Far*, a modest and

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pleasant comedy, and *Xiu Xiu: The Sent Down Girl*, an equally modest and worthy character study set in modern China. The fifth film is a refreshingly immodest French movie, *The Lovers on the Bridge*, that mixes grunge and lyricism with surprising success.

What sixteen out of these eighteen films have in common is that you might as well wait for the video. On your TV screen the modest comedies will still modestly amuse you and the modest dramas will still modestly touch you, and the cinematic junk will become video garbage. Only *The Lovers on the Bridge*, with its camera pyrotechnics and outsized emotions, and *The Sixth Sense*, which can fill an entire theater with its compassionate dread, demand the big screen. (Since writing this I've seen *Three Kings* and would add this exciting mutation of the soldier-of-fortune adventure story to the list.)

What makes this the best of times and the worst of times for movie lovers is one fact: Everything winds up as a video. It's the best of times because great cinema can now be packaged and bought (or borrowed from libraries) in the same way that great literature can. It gives me a small but distinct thrill to see Bresson's *A Man Escaped* and Olivier's *Henry V* sitting on my bookshelf not far from books by Willa Cather and Joseph Conrad. I can even browse through these movies now by fast-forwarding in the same way that I thumb through a favorite novel.

Yet it's the worst of times, too. Neither *A Man Escaped* nor *Henry V* was intended by its maker to be shown on a TV screen in a living room for the benefit of two or three people. The ascetic Bresson work and the rabble-rousing Olivier film were both intended for audiences in an auditorium and were meant to cause that electrifying chain reaction that only audiences feel. Their greatness persists in video format, of course, but in the rerun houses of the sixties and seventies, the excitement great old movies sparked in audiences somehow certified and enhanced the excitement being provoked by the new ones. In 1972, you may have loved the wedding celebration that opened *The Godfa-*

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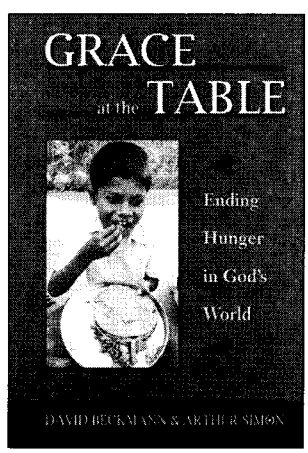

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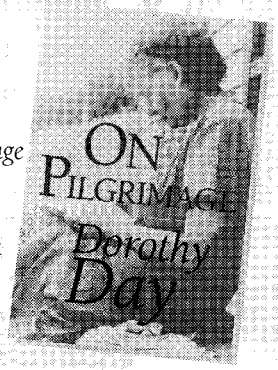
ther, but you loved it more when you realized that it was inspired by the layered beauty of the ball in Visconti's *The Leopard*. And you were able to make the connection because you could take in *The Leopard* at the rerun house around the block from where *The Godfather* was playing. It was like seeing the work of an exciting new painter at a gallery and then popping into a museum to see the new artist's classic influences. A tradition was being carried on before your eyes.

That community of filmgoers is no longer. The classic past exists on video which, ideally, should make it available to anybody with a video player. But, in fact, the video revolution has pushed the classics underground. Few video stores stock a great number of them and the ones that are available are often shelved in obscure corners. (Libraries can be much better sources but they need movie-savvy librarians to order unusual titles and, of course, an adequate budget that hasn't been depleted by buying top-of-the-line computer equipment.) Film buffs will seek them out just as they seek out the few theaters left that run the best independent and foreign movies. What we have now are essentially two audiences: the mass audience which has heard about only the megahits, and the cognoscenti who seek out the classics and the best of the new stuff in theaters and on video and occasionally bestow their business on some out-of-the-ordinary popular entertainment such as *American Beauty*. But such crossovers are in one direction only. Thirty years ago, Catherine Deneuve was as well known as Audrey Hepburn. Today, the Chinese Gong Li is as drop-dead gorgeous as Deneuve and an even better actress, but it's a rare moviegoer outside New York or Los Angeles who knows her name. Gerard Depardieu does have the international clout Mastroianni once had, but do you really believe that the percentage of the American audience that knows his non-Hollywood work is as sizable as the percentage that had seen Mastroianni in *La Dolce Vita*? In short, the general public and the intellectually curious are not enjoying, not even looking at, the same things. (Interestingly, certain TV programs can now draw both audiences—I'm thinking of "Seinfeld" and "Law and Order.")

Consequently, the larger audience's ability to recognize movies of quality dissipates while the supposedly better-educated audience acquires a decadent edge. Rightly searching for thrills and grandeur, the kids at the multiplexes (and they are mostly kids) are being offered stories in which the literal explosiveness (gunfire, bombings, mutilations, sheer noise) is supposed to make up for the lack of emotional resonance. But it doesn't, and occasionally the audience sends a message to the filmmakers that it doesn't. I wasn't one of those besotted by *Titanic*, but I feel sympathetic toward the high school girls who made up such a large part of its audience. They were returning four, five, six times, not to watch a ship sink but to see a young Adonis called Leonardo die for love, which is exactly what the Adonises of mythology and literature are created to

ON PILGRIMAGE

Dorothy Day



Available for the first time since its limited printing in 1948, *On Pilgrimage* is published here with a foreword by Michael O. Gravey and a substantial introduction by Mark and Louise Zwick that highlights Day's early life and her commitment to the Catholic Worker movement.

"This collection, gathered from her 1948 diary entries, offers an intimate glimpse into Day's life and work. . . . Whether she's writing about a visit to her daughter's farm or her work with the poor, Day locates the gift of God's love in every moment."
— *Publishers Weekly*

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do. Those girls were yearning for emotional size, not for more and more garish effects. (Case in point: On the day *Titanic* was released on video, I was browsing through a Tower Records in New York City and noticed four nymphs gazing adoringly up at a video monitor showing the newest release. These children had cut school—a Catholic school, no less— to watch, on a tiny screen, washed out by the late morning light coming through the windows, Leonardo swoon once again into icy waters for the sake of his beloved Kate. I'm willing to wager they had seen the film on the big screen at least a dozen times. But it was pathos, not spectacle, they were hungry for.)

Over at the smaller theaters, the audiences from the universities and the upper middle class are given, on the one hand, burnished renderings of E.M. Forster, Oscar Wilde, Henry James, and, on the other hand, supposedly "cutting-edge" independent American films, like the one in which a young woman expresses her inner self by making love to corpses. I've enjoyed and praised in these pages both the "Masterpiece Theater" posh jobs and the grainier stuff of independent release but, too often, both categories brandish the same mistake: the subject matter—grungy or elegant—is supposed to make up for the lack of true innovation in the filmmaking. In the sixties and seventies, the great directors didn't adopt Henry James and James Joyce. No, they were the Jameses and Joyces of a new medium, and they didn't coast on explicit violence and perverted sex, because they were more interested in the turmoil within, not surface sensationalism.

For the true critic, the critic I'm still trying to become, the past is not a crutch for the reminiscing sorehead who beats the present over the head with it. Rather, the best of the past is the source for revolt against trendiness. Artists (or at least artist types) who pride themselves on being nonconformist often submit to their own brand of conformity. How many young American scriptwriters are slavishly aping the narrative strategies of Quentin Tarantino, and how many others are loading their screenplays with "bright" dialogue that would sound better in an episode of "Friends" or "Just Shoot Me"? To me, all trends are suspect, especially the "subversive" ones, the ones that "push the envelope" or that belong to "the cutting edge." (Why are all these phrases so bullying?)

Given all of the above, what better platform could I be granted than a column in *Commonweal*, which has always cast a cold eye on all trendiness within the church and within the culture at large? Better still, this magazine also views with suspicion the instant rejection of innovation. Has there ever been another publication—secular or religious—that so consistently refuses to push the reader's buttons, though I'm sure that if there were a button marked "look closer," *Commonweal* would press it all the time.

I would like to think that I have located this button in a few readers and pressed it quite often. □

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The gospel according to Cahill

Desire of the Everlasting Hills
The World Before and After Jesus
By Thomas Cahill
Doubleday, $24.95, 343 pp.

Luke Timothy Johnson

This is the third in Thomas Cahill's series of seven books called "The Hinges of History," a popular cultural history that focuses on "the great gift-givers" who shaped the patrimony of the West. *How the Irish Saved Civilization* and *The Gifts of the Jews* were best sellers. If the obscurity of its title can be overcome, the present book will undoubtedly do well also, not least because it is about Jesus, a brand name that sells almost as reliably as Prozac these days. Cahill writes a sort of fast-food history that is sufficiently nutritious to be consumed both rapidly and with guiltless pleasure. I read all three books not long ago while stuck on an interminably delayed plane in Atlanta and had huge fun when I should have been suffering.

Cahill's histories are popular in both style and substance. He follows the guidance of recognized authorities on his respective topics, modifying them mostly in the direction of liveliness and point. He allows himself the narrator's privilege of filling gaps in the evidence with lively but entirely imaginary scenes. His books bristle with big people and big ideas: In *Gifts*, for example, Abraham, Moses, and David all help create a historical world in which each moment provides the possibility of the new and surprising in response to a personal and living God; in *Irish*, Patrick and his successors save the West by copying the Latin classics.

Cahill constructs his stories as occasions for celebration more than critical analysis. He seeks to encourage a sense of appreciation for the gifts offered the present from the past. In each of the volumes, he follows the same formula: the situation in the world prior to the gift-giver, the shape of the gift, the impact on Western culture. His entry into these worlds is mainly through literature. He is a strong reader, and clearly delights in sharing some of the insights he has discovered. And if he sometimes gets a little too cozy in his comments or a bit too broad in his generalizations, each of his books also offers moments of genuine insight into the workings of culture, literature, and the human heart.

His books have slowly been increasing in size. The slender 218 pages of *Irish* was followed by 252 pages of text in *Gifts*; now *Desire* has 343 pages. The greater length of *Gifts* may have been due to the larger canvas. Ancient Israelite history is considerably longer and more complex than Irish medieval history. But the time-period covered by *Desire* is quite short, extending only from Alexander the Great to John the Evangelist. I think the relative length of the book has more to do with the problems Cahill faced in writing about Jesus.

The first problem is the extraordinary complexity of dealing with Jesus as a historical figure. Like many before him, Cahill has discovered that the writings of the New Testament—in particular Paul and the Gospels—are rich resources for the interpretation of Jesus by those who believed in him, but they are, for that very reason, difficult to reduce to a simple historical narrative. Unlike many before him, Cahill has had the good sense to remain modest in his reconstruction of Jesus' ministry, allowing room for serious consideration of the diverse witnesses to Jesus found in the writings of Paul, Luke, and John. A sound move, but one that takes up space.

A second factor contributing to this book's length—although it is still an easy read—is that Cahill is a bit more ambivalent about the "gifts" given by Jesus. Or, to put it better, he is ambivalent about the way the gift of Jesus has been

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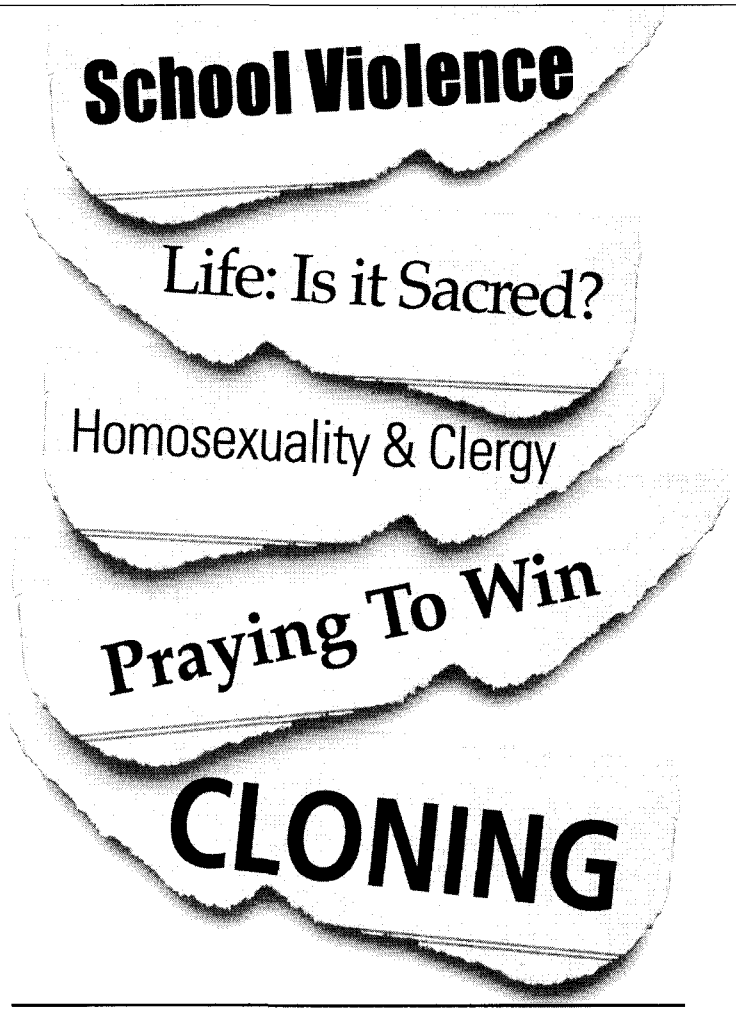
mediated by Christianity. The story here is not as simple as that of copying manuscripts so the learning of antiquity is not lost; the contribution of Christianity to the heritage of the West is both complex and controversial. Cahill rightly refuses to improve the sources by speaking only of the features that are attractive to contemporary readers. He acknowledges the patriarchalism of some of Paul's letters and the slanderous polemic against the Jews in John's Gospel. To his credit, Cahill helps the reader see that, however offensive such elements appear to us, they arose out of real and difficult circumstances, and—more to the point—require honest engagement if the positive elements of the Christian heritage are also to be affirmed.

Some small irritating features of the earlier books continue to annoy in this one. A writer so capable of felicitous and even elegant phrasing needs to have his editor eliminate inappropriately colloquial diction, as when Cleopatra is called the "teen Queen," or when Cahill responds to Jesus' prohibition against lust in the heart with, "Earth to Jesus: Hello!" And on that same subject, Cahill remains adolescently preoccupied with the sexual. But perhaps the author is less to blame than the editor for these dips into the vulgar. Anyone who has tried to write for audiences other than the stodgily academic has heard the repeated urgings to "Punch up that prose! Generate some human interest!" A less happy tendency for the historian is asserting more than the evidence will allow. The fault is venial when small gaps are filled by the creation of vivid scenes, such as the meeting of Peter and Paul (complete with physical descriptions); it gets more serious when the latter days of the Johannine church are reconstructed with no more than wisps of evidence.

There are also many things to applaud in the book. As in his earlier works, Cahill enhances our appreciation for the "gift" given by his subject by means of contrast to "the world before" and by means of continuity to "the world after." His reconstruction of the world of Greco-Roman empire, and of Jewish resistance to empire, establishes the conquering Alexander as the model human and con-



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centrates on the patterns of aggression, power, possession, and revenge that characterize a world defined by conquest. His depiction of the world after Jesus, in contrast, uses as its example the Community of Sant'Egidio, an ecumenical lay organization founded in Rome in 1968 by a handful of high school students to live lives of full discipleship in service to the world's suffering ones, including AIDS patients. Cahill's Jesus, as we might expect, represents by his teaching and by the manner of his life the reversal of the values of self-assertion in favor of the values of self-donation. If anything must be chosen as the key gift of Jesus to the culture of the West—Cahill's expressed interest—this is a good choice.

The title for the chapter in which Cahill sketches Jesus' ministry is cunningly called, "The Last of the Prophets: The Jesus the Apostles Knew," for it enables Cahill at once to say something definite about Jesus' work among his people and to recognize that even this reconstruction is based on tradition. As always, Cahill is generous in his citation of texts, so that readers less familiar with these matters can learn from the rhythms of the compositions themselves. The device of placing subdiscussions within separate boxes—as when Cahill refers to John Dominic Crossan and Barbara Thiering—enhances the journalistic feel of the book and enables Cahill to keep his main narrative lean. The sketch of Jesus' ministry itself is brief, moving quickly from John the Baptist and Jesus' baptism to the call of disciples, the Sermon on the Mount (with particular emphasis on its reversal of cultural values), and the way in which Jesus' association with the marginal made him distinctive among Jews of his day.

The succeeding chapters take up the theme of Jesus-as-interpreted more explicitly. The treatment of "Paul's Jesus" is particularly welcome now, when so much of the attention to the historical Jesus begins by eliminating Paul from consideration. Yes, there are the overly casual (indeed, irresponsible) characterizations like this one, to distract the reader: "It seems that Chloe and her people attended a Eucharist led by a flamboyant male transvestite and a strange woman who sported a butch haircut." And if in earlier generations, one might think that Paul only wrote Galatians and Romans, so obsessive was the concern for the "religious" issues of law and grace, Cahill joins those who read Paul almost exclusively through 1 Corinthians, as though "social" issues were alone important.

Similarly, by agreeing with the dominant hypothesis that all the patriarchal elements in Paul are to be found in pseudonymous letters and that Paul himself is unswervingly egalitarian, Cahill misses the chance to engage what is perhaps the most important of the social gifts Paul has given. Egalitarian ideals must always struggle to find expression within stratifying structures, and the way to advance that struggle is seldom clear. The fact that Paul shows us both the ideal and the social realities and, however clumsily, attempts to honor both, makes of his letters not a set of answers to impose on our world, but the beginning of a conversation that we can continue in our world.

Nevertheless, on the single biggest point, Cahill gets it right, which is Paul's insight into the implications of Jesus' suffering, death, and Resurrection: "The man Jesus' teaching and all the acts of his life (such as his healing miracles) had been given definitive approval by God himself, who has raised this Jesus from the dead. Jesus is, therefore, not only the promised Messiah of the Jews, but has shown forth in the words and deeds of his life what God expected of each human being. He is the model whom we all must imitate." For Paul, it is not the accidental details of Jesus' past that matter, but the fundamental pattern of Jesus' existence, that outlook on the world that Paul calls "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16), and that mode of compassionate service that he means by "the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2).

Cahill also makes unusually good use of the Lucan narratives, the Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. He uses Luke's Gospel to bring out the theme of Jesus' mercy and compassion, which are so

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richly illustrated by the distinctively Lucan parables. Luke also stresses both prayer and the use of possessions, enabling Cahill to note the way in which the Christian tradition sees both prayer and social action as part of the same prophetic witness in the world. His treatment of Acts, under the title, "The People of the Way," gives him the opportunity to speak of the Resurrection appearances and Pentecost (correctly, in my judgment) as part of the same Easter experience that transformed Jesus' followers and enabled them to follow new patterns of life (such as the sharing of possessions) and—in continuity with Jesus' outreach to the marginal—to invite even Gentiles to the table of fellowship.

Despite his basically celebratory tone, Cahill cannot entirely shake his ambivalence concerning the heritage of the New Testament. What thoughtful person among us can? Cahill sees and laments the ways in which the self-interest of the church as institution and the twisted ways of the human heart have manipulated and misshapen the precious gifts it contains. He sees as well that the potential for such abuses is found within the texts themselves. But every word of this book suggests that Cahill is more pleased than not that the world has been visited by this Jesus, has been shaped by these texts, has been engaged by this church. His book does no real damage and does some real good. For a book about Jesus and the early Christians, that is itself a gift. □

Luke Timothy Johnson *is the Robert W. Woodruff professor of New Testament at the Candler School of Theology at Emory University. His most recent book is* Living Jesus *(HarperSanFrancisco).*

DEPRESSING & EXHILARATING

Commonweal Confronts the Century
Liberal Convictions, Catholic Tradition
Edited by Patrick Jordan & Paul Baumann
Touchstone, $18, 411 pp.

Mary McGrory

This fat anthology is, as you might expect, deeply depressing. The material—the rise of Nazism, the Great Depression, the war in Vietnam—dictates it. But these pages are also exhilarating reading, especially, I would think, for Catholics. Whatever the catastrophe—the injustice, the evil, the breadlines, concentration camps, the unenlightening encyclical—*Commonweal* was there to face it, to mark the truth and consequences.

These selections from issues going back to the year of its founding, 1924, make clear why *Commonweal* has had influence and fame far beyond its circulation, a modest 20,000. Periodicals with ten times that number cannot claim the luster of its name, the clarity of its identity. As Peter Steinfels, a one-time editor, says in his introduction, it put into our language the term "*Commonweal* Catholic" which has come to mean believers who think as much as they feel about religion. The tone of the magazine is unwaveringly civil, humane, and rational.

Now somewhat archaic, the term "*Commonweal* Catholic" could once be applied from the bottom to the top, from the earnest, searching bookkeeper to the supreme pontiff. By my lights, Pope John XXIII, *Commonweal*'s hero, is certainly a "*Commonweal* Catholic." The present pope, John Paul II, is not, I would say, being of a more institutional cast of mind and being unrelenting in such matters as birth control. In the anthology Bernard Häring, a theologian and member of the papal birth control commission, has writ-

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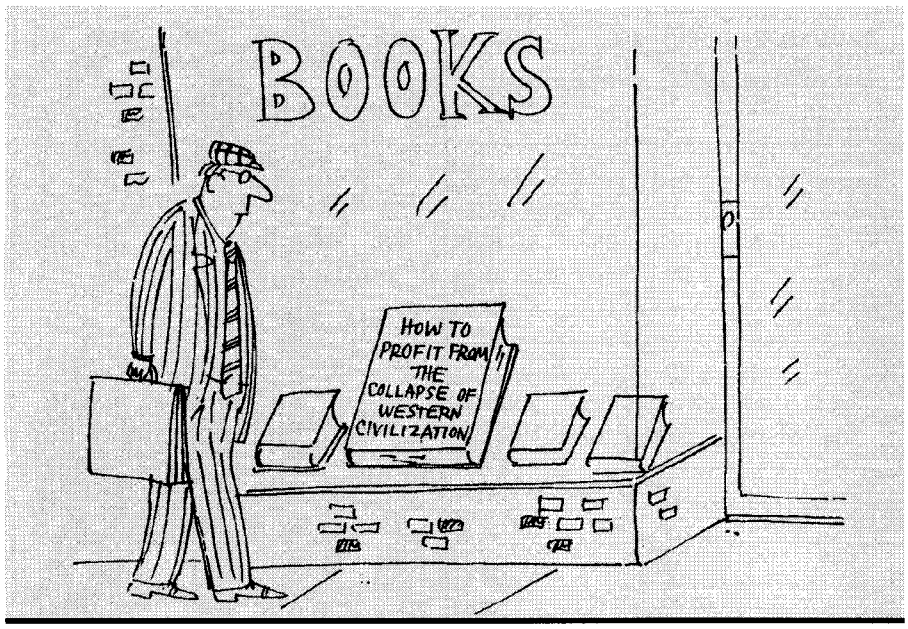

ten a searing essay on the matter. In it, he points out the dearth of "a solid presentation from human experience...and good arguments." He says, "it is no insult at all to the Holy Spirit if we continue to express our doubts." Millions of Catholics shared his doubts and fell away from the church. It is not something you would read in a sanctioned Catholic publication, where the emphasis is apt to be on blind faith and acceptance of God's will.

Commonweal took upon itself the daunting task of reconciling American Catholics to democratic diversity. Its editors worked the rope line between religion and politics. The election of the first Catholic president, John F. Kennedy, eased that tension considerably. The magazine also bravely entered the arena of Catholicism and modern culture. One of the delightful selections is drama critic Walter Kerr's exasperation with pious Catholic kitsch in the arts. "The church in this country has permitted itself to become identified with the well-meaning second rate," Kerr writes. "It has seemed to say, 'I don't care what the quality of the art work is, so long as its content is innocuous, or perhaps favorably disposed in our direction.'" Many Catholics who grew up in the era of aggressive mediocrity in matters cultural and educational will groan in agreement.

What art should be is the subject of a splendid defense of art as escapism by Willa Cather: "The world has a habit of being in a bad way from time to time and art has never contributed anything to help matters—except escape." Willa Cather, being a great artist, does not feel called upon to justify her every premise. She simply states her views without going through a laborious process of reasoning such as many other *Commonweal* contributors, those dealing with theological riddles like the gender of God, feel obliged to do. She also writes in short sentences, while others are given to more convoluted prose not conducive to easy reading.

This twentieth-century collection is replete with examples of first-class journalism right from the start. When the Nazis invaded Austria in 1938, George N. Shuster, a former *Commonweal* managing editor, was there. He conveys, with *Commonweal*'s wonted restraint, "the full moral ignominy of what happened." Of Hitler's entrance into Vienna, to the pealing of church bells, he writes, "I do not wish to judge harshly, but I doubt whether in all history there is a more shameless incident."

Budd Schulberg describes a labor priest, a Jesuit named Father John Corridan, who brought Christ to the waterfront, not by preaching, but by teaching workers' rights that included a welfare fund and paid vacations. There is a Chicago social worker's story of trying to bring order into the grimy lives of the poor. A mother begs him to leave the name of her dead son on the welfare rolls for another month. He does.

"This Man Has Expired" is Robert Johnson's firsthand account of an execution, a scrupulously detailed description of the "execution team" which performs its grisly duties, one at a time. Many powerful tracts about the death penalty have been written. None has been more powerful than this.

Commonweal faced up to all the moral crises of the age: Hiroshima, abortion, Vietnam. An especially poignant, searching entry comes from John Cogley, a *Commonweal* familiar and pilgrim soul if ever there was one. He describes his feelings of inadequacy when faced with the ardent pacifist, Dorothy Day, who, with her friends, went to prison to protest against the H-bomb. He concludes: "There was scarcely a protest from the Catholics of America when one we call a saint was put behind bars. She protested against the destruction of mankind. Those who protest against risqué movies are given Catholic Action medals."

Commonweal is hospitable to dissenting views, and I don't mean just from abortion activists. It gives room to Catholics out of step with the magazine's editorial positions. In "The Everlasting Dilemma," Paul Elie seems to suffer nostalgia for the pre-Vatican II church. The council was the greatest event in the history of the modern church, but Elie notes the absence of the moral certitudes and thick Catholic culture of what he calls the "Catholic tradition." It is still available in the church after John XXIII, you just have to search harder for it.

Of John XXIII, there is, for me, disappointingly little mention. John was charisma itself. He made it clear that it is not a sin to be charming even if you are pope. He made his church a place of welcome and compassion for all God's children. I wish *Commonweal* had given him more space in this admirable volume. He made *Commonweal* Catholics' lives easier, at least for a while. □

Mary McGrory *is a columnist for the* Washington Post.

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IRELAND WITHOUT TEARS

A Star Called Henry
By Roddy Doyle
Viking, $24.95, 343 pp.

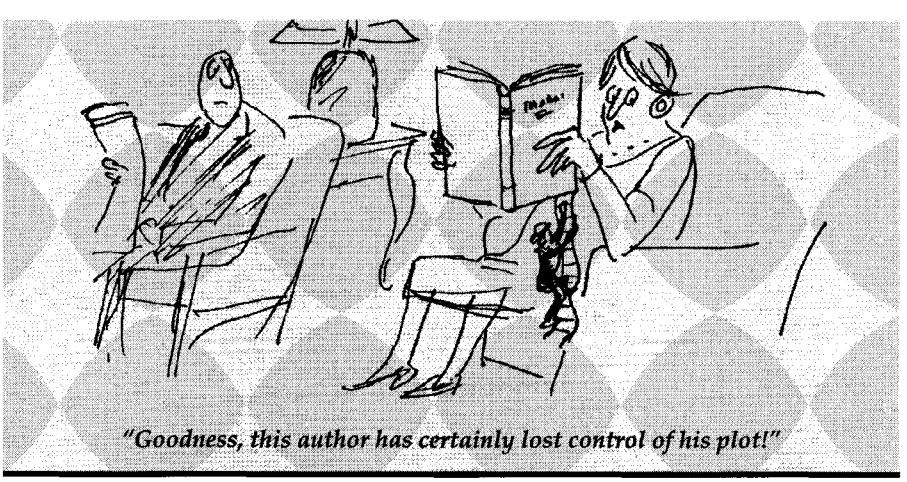
Paul Elie

The early novels of Roddy Doyle were recognizable simply by the way they were laid out in type: long kite-strings of dialogue running down the pages, one- and two-word tags of speech set off by dashes and surrounded by gales of white space. The books were so slim, so light, so casually done, so effortlessly enjoyable, that at first it was hard to believe a big international publisher had troubled to print and bind them and pay smartly dressed graduates of fancy American colleges to write letters and make phone calls on their behalf. And yet *The Commitments*, about some Irish kids in the sixties who formed an after-school soul band, had the elusive quality the band and its mates craved—it had soul. And when it was put together with two other little books and dubbed the *Barrytown Trilogy*, suddenly Roddy Doyle himself—he was a public school teacher outside Dublin, but now he had quit his job and was writing full time—seemed a kind of authentic Irish soul man. The two novels that followed the *Barrytown* books (*Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* and *The Woman Who Walked into Doors*) were more conventionally prosy and well-rounded, and the Booker Prize given to *Paddy Clarke* in 1993 established their author as legitimately literary, but Doyle's writing still seemed to me most distinctive for what was left out of it. There was no silence, exile, or cunning here; no church, and no cramp of religion, but no folk religion of Ireland and the Irish, either; no lace-curtain lyricism, no author striving to transcend his origins or educate his reader. Here was a street-level, come-as-you-are account of contemporary Ireland, a place made new and surprising to its people by their sudden lack of interest in their past and their identity—an interest, it seemed, that had been exported to the United States.

Perhaps it was inevitable that Doyle would get around to writing a historical novel. *A Star Called Henry* takes place during the founding of the Irish Republic, the time of the Great War and afterward, and its characters cross paths with James Connolly and Michael Collins (but not, it is worth noting, with any of the literary figures of the period). The title page says the novel is the first book of *The Last Roundup*, another trilogy, and the two books to follow will presumably bring the story up to the time where Doyle started his career, the sixties Dublin of *The Commitments*.

The novel begins, though, with a sepia prehistory set in Victorian Dublin. The protagonist, a young man named Henry Smart—for this is a coming-of-age story—is his family's third Henry. His mother, called Melody, likes to sit him down on the front step in the evening and look up at the sky and point out the star that is her first son Henry, whom God took to heaven. Her husband, too, is Henry, an amputee ne'er-do-well who tramps around in an overcoat that hasn't been washed in generations, and sometimes works as the doorman at a Dublin brothel, where he wields his wooden leg like a club. As it turns out, the young Henry knows his father hardly better than his dead brother when the father, caught in the middle in a bit of underworld double-crossing, disappears. "Who was he and where did he come from? The family trees of the poor don't grow to any height. I know nothing real about my father; I don't even know if his name was real....He made up his life as he went along. Where was his leg? South Africa, Glasnevin, under the sea. She heard enough stories to bury ten legs. War, an infection, the fairies, a train. He invented himself, and reinvented. He left a trail of Henry Smarts before he finally disappeared. A soldier, a sailor, a butler—the first one-legged butler to serve the Queen. He'd killed sixteen Zulus with the freshly severed limb."

That passage is a good example of Doyle's herky-jerky street poetry, which he has retrofitted in this book for the nineteenth century, mixing in legend, maxim, and on-the-spot fictionalizing with the narrator's frank first-person talk. His trademark single-word exchanges are here, too. And so is his light touch. As Henry comes of age—a "street arab" traipsing around London with his younger brother, Victor—their desperate circumstances are depicted as comic adventures: grasping rats barehanded before crowds to earn spare change, sneaking into school only to be thrown out again for being too poor. They are characters on the margins, which allows Doyle to write a historical novel without bringing in large tracts of history, facts and figures, pe-



"Goodness, this author has certainly lost control of his plot!"

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riod costumes and furniture, or old-time diction and slang. And here, as in his earlier books, his omission of these seems to make a point about Ireland and Irish writing.

> —Do you love Ireland, lads?
>
> We didn't understand the question. Ireland was something in songs that drunken old men wept about as they held on to the railings at three in the morning and we homed in to rob them: that was all. I loved Victor and my memories of other people. That was all I understood about love.

Victor dies soon afterward; Henry grows up to be astonishingly handsome, a fact he is too fond of telling the reader, and seduces the boys' young teacher, a flouter of convention named Miss O'Shea. Before long—Henry's stated indifference to Ireland notwithstanding—the two of them are caught up in the war for Irish independence: lovers, revolutionaries, and finally husband and wife, father and mother. "We became man and wife without me hearing her first name. She was and stayed my Miss O'Shea. I never knew her name."

The story from there must be one of the cheeriest war stories ever written. Henry and Miss O'Shea pass from one historical point to the next—now losing, now finding each other. Their story is exuberantly told; line for line, the prose is vivid, sensual, original, gripping—yet it points up the one real weakness of Roddy Doyle's writing, one that is perhaps more obvious in a historical novel about the Irish revolution than in an offhand comic sketch about an Irish soul band. His novels are easily read, easily enjoyed, and, once finished, easily forgotten. Little survives the reading but their charm. And so it is for Doyle's protagonist here: Although he is a war hero and the hero of his own exploits—and his own sexual exploits—Henry Smart is not interesting enough to be the hero of a novel.

Not yet, anyway. After all, *A Star Called Henry* is the first book in a trilogy. Roddy Doyle is a star himself now; whether he is a great novelist is another matter. We await his, and Henry Smart's, further adventures. □

Paul Elie, *a frequent contributor, is the editor of* Tremor of Bliss: Contemporary Writers on the Saints *(Riverhead).*

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CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 4)

interesting is his criticism of Weigel's "virtual silence about the pope's coolness toward figures like Oscar Romero." Following a lecture by George Weigel several years ago, I drew attention to the pope's "very muted reaction" to the assassination of Romero, and asked whether the same response was even remotely conceivable had an archbishop been shot at the altar in Poland or elsewhere in Eastern Europe. I added that "one of John Paul's cardinals" had personally confided to me his conviction of a "double standard" in this regard. The only response was a denial of any double standard. Earlier this

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year Father Avery Dulles, questioned about the same matter, admitted that he, too, had no answer. He was more candid than Weigel, however, in admitting this. (REV.) JOHN JAY HUGHES

Saint Louis, Mo.

The writer is a church historian.

A missing Picasso

In her review of Richard Viladesau's *Theological Aesthetics* [September 24], Daria Donnelly refers to the "church decorations at Assy by Léger, Rouault, Matisse, Picasso, and Braque."

In fact, Picasso initially was consulted about joining the project at Assy, but later these negotiations were terminated; Picasso did not contribute any art to the chapel.

For the record, in addition to Braque, Léger, Matisse, and Rouault, the complete list of contributing artists includes Bazaine, Berçot, Bonnard, Bony, Crianchon, Chagall, Couturier, Demaison, Hérbert-Stevens, Huré, Lipchitz, Lurçat, and Richier.

(REV.) HARRY M. CULKIN

Douglaston, N.Y.

A dangerous Jesus

Though I have not read Roger Haight's Christology [*Jesus Symbol of God*, reviewed October 8], I have enough acquaintance with the postmodern categories of "experience" and "symbol" to concur with John Cavadini's insightful critique of the deconstruction of the central Christian symbol, Jesus Christ. Cavadini hints at another problem implicit in this postmodern Christology, namely that it renders Jesus incomprehensible to the experience of the Christian community, present and past.

Traditionally, the faithful have interpreted the Jesus of history—this Jesus of "dangerous memory" (and rightly so!)—through an intimate relationship with the risen Lord who comes to each of us with wounds in hands, feet, and side, inviting us to take up our cross and follow him. As so many people of God have witnessed, we mysteriously enter into his very life and death through our baptism, and are nourished by the very gift of his body—broken and shared—in the Eucharist. Should not this experience of Jesus Christ, the God of love, stand as the primary hermeneutical lens through which the theologian and biblical scholar view the Jesus of history and all of Christian experience? I suggest von Balthasar as a helpful guide in exploring these questions.

PETER V. SHAUGHNESSY

Chicago, Ill.

A misreading of Haight

I was rather dismayed by John Cavadini's review of Roger Haight's *Jesus Symbol of God*. While I have some disagreements with Haight's text, I find that the reviewer seriously misreads Haight on "symbol."

Cavadini thinks that Haight construes Jesus as merely a symbol of God that merely mediates God. This is misleading. When I read Haight I wondered why he did not title his book *Jesus: Sacrament of God*, or *Jesus:*

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Revelation of God, despite his writing a Christology "from below," which he thinks precludes using these terms.

Haight basically adopts Rahner's concept of the symbol. In a similar vein, in *Models of Revelation*, Avery Dulles says that all revelation and faith are symbolic. Dulles makes explicit that some symbols are "sacramental," in that they do not merely "represent" another reality but do so by participation in it and mediation of it. Dulles says such symbols "contain and mediate the reality they signify."

While Haight's comments on symbolism are not as explicit as Dulles's on "participation," Cavadini is wrong to say that a symbol "by definition mediates something else." Haight writes that the Christian experience "is that it is truly God who is encountered in Jesus." Only symbolic language can represent (not describe) the mystery of "how God is present in Jesus." Haight has a principle of distinction (not separation, as Cavadini writes) between Jesus and God coded into his theology. Without such a distinction, a Christology would likely be Docetic. Without symbolic language, the mystery would be lost. Like Cavadini, I would see little or no reason to remain a Christian if Jesus were "merely a symbol." But he is not, even in Haight's account.

TERRENCE W. TILLEY
Dayton, Ohio

Sign & symbol & Jesus

In her most recent book, Sandra M. Schneiders, I.H.M., writes: "There is growing consensus among scholars in the semantic disciplines that 'sign' and 'symbol' are very different realities and that using the terms interchangeably leads to substantial confusion" (*Written that You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*). I think that in his review of Roger Haight's *Jesus Symbol of God*, John Cavadini really treats symbol as basically synonymous with sign, and this allows him to dismiss Haight's work so summarily. For him, if Jesus is "merely a symbol" he cannot be divine, the implication being that Haight has given us a merely human Jesus.

Cavadini's trouble seems to be with "the adequacy of the postmodern category 'symbol' itself to render an account of God's love in Christ." Sandra Schneiders again lends some help: "Although there is much theoretical diversity among those working in several disciplines with symbolism, there is today broad consensus at least on the nature and function of the symbol, and the following definition would...be generally acceptable: Symbol can be defined as (1) a sensible reality (2) which renders present to and (3) involves a person objectively in (4) a transforming experience (5) of transcendent mystery. Of the five elements of this definition, only the first is common to both sign and symbol."

I submit that Haight's work is a real contribution to "postmodern Christology" and a vital step toward true dialogue with our non-Christian sisters and brothers, and as such deserves a review from someone more in agreement with what Schneiders tells us regarding the nature and function of symbol.

PETER A. FITZPATRICK
Chicago, Ill.

The reviewer replies:

With all due respect, the question is not whether in absolute terms Haight has an adequate theory of symbol, but whether his theory is adequate to a tradition which claims that Jesus not only mediates God but also *is* God. It is not misleading to say that for Haight a symbol by definition "mediates something other than itself." These are his own words, emphatically repeated three times on page 197; then, on page 198: "A concrete symbol...mediates a real presence within itself of something other than itself"; *see* also, page 201.

I do not hide the possibility that for Haight "it is truly God that is encountered in Jesus"; my review even concedes the possibility that for Haight, Jesus the symbol "makes God absolutely and fully present." But do we have sufficient grounds for concluding, therefore, that Jesus *is* God? There are other concrete religious symbols, according to Haight, both Christian and non-Christian, in which God is truly encountered; are we entitled to say that they in any way *are* God?

There is a crucial distinction here which Haight's theory of symbol cannot negotiate. Jesus in Catholic tradition mediates to us the presence, not of another, but of none other than himself. If he mediates the presence of someone other than himself, we have indeed what is classically called "separation." Haight says that "Jesus is worshiped insofar as Jesus embodies God and makes God present"—not insofar as he is God. Does Haight recommend the worship of other true symbols insofar as they "embody God and make God present"? Presumably not, but I submit that Haight has no way of securing the distinction between these symbols and Jesus.

The ideas Tilley cites from Dulles would indeed be reassuring if they were in Haight's book; Haight seems actually to depart from Dulles, who says: "Symbols do not necessarily point to things strictly other than themselves."

JOHN CAVADINI

Coping with Darwin

In his article, "The Darwinian Struggle" [September 24], John Haught asks Catholics to "pay attention" to the debate over evolution, and concludes that "it is now time for a more rigorous and publicly accessible renewal of post-Darwinian theology."

I had the privilege of collaborating with the late Karl Schmitz-Moorman while he wrote his *Theology of Creation in an Evolutionary World* [Pilgrim Press, 1997] at the Center of Theological Inquiry at Princeton. He applies a philosophy of becoming to the meaning of tradition, and of union to the evolution of consciousness, information, and freedom. New insights into the inner life of the Holy Trinity and into evil and predestination create fertile ground for future systematic theological reflection.

Unfortunately, Schmitz-Moorman's work is relatively unknown among

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his fellow Roman Catholics. Because of its perceived significance, however, the influential quarterly *Zygon, Journal of Religion and Science* [June 1999] devoted a symposium to the book. One of the two essayists, a theoretical physicist now a dean at Purdue, says the author "has given us a wonderful legacy on which to ponder." The other, a professor at the Lutheran Theological Seminary, writes that the book "should be regarded as a programmatic proposal and a trenchant one at that." Neither author is Catholic; both commend Schmitz-Moorman's Catholic approach as ground-breaking. A German translation has received the same kind of praise in European publications.

I commend Haught for raising concern about a lack of interest in American Catholic circles on the need to investigate the serious implications of the "Darwinian struggle."

(REV.) JAMES F. SALMON, S.J.
Baltimore, Md.

'Tu es sacerdos in aeternum'*

Though I agree with Ken Lovasik's view of the canonical status I share with him as a "resigned priest" ["Not for Hire," June 4], and while I, too, have chosen not to engage in a non-canonical ministry (that is, without authorization by a bishop), I do not believe there is nothing more to be said. For one thing, I disagree with the view expressed in John Hawes's letter [Correspondence, July 16] that "the issue of celibacy should not be part of this discussion; it is an issue separate from that of resignation." To the contrary, the only reason I became a "resigned priest" was that I chose no longer to be celibate and to marry.

I respected the canonical forms and filled out the corresponding papers, but I did not accept their scriptural, theological, or historical justification, not to mention their insinuation that I must be some kind of degenerate, or was dubiously ordained. I made it clear that the only barrier to my continuing as a priest was that I wished to marry. I haven't heard back from the "competent ecclesiastical authorities" in more than twenty years. Yet today we have the farce of the law requiring celibacy being dispensed with for the benefit of married former Anglican/Episcopal priests (many of whom transferred from their former denomination because it ordained women, to the delight of the "no women priests" party in ours), while "cradle" Catholic priests are treated as pariahs for marrying. The problem is compounded, in the same way as the issue of contraception, by the papal monarch reserving decision-making power to himself, in contravention of the spirit if not the letter of episcopal collegiality, and with no consultation of the "pious faithful" in favor of the hierarchical idolatry of the celibacy law.

Like Ken Lovasik, "I would not hesitate to minister as a priest if there were a true emergency where no canonical priest is available," but have no wish to function as a "free-lance" priest administering the sacraments.

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As an assistant public defender and member of Pax Christi, I find plenty of scope to minister in other ways. My experience has been that, at least in Florida, there are more "noncanonical" than "canonical" priests involved in justice and peace ministry, described by the 1971 Synod of Bishops as that "constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel." Still, I respect the alternative choice of married priests who continue to preside over the Eucharist.

Having done my studies at the Gregorian and having been ordained in Rome, I am as steeped in *Romanita* as any Vatican functionary, but I am also aware of the historical need to conclude the era of absolute papal monarchy. It seems to me that the bishops are enabling our present pope to play a modern-day Innocent III or even Boniface VIII. I know of no evidence that the pope is even aware of such dangerous historical precedents.

MICHAEL L. O'NEILL
De Land, Fla.

**Editors' note:* For the benefit of all 257 subscribers who've forgotten the Latin they learned at their Mother's knee, as well as the 859 who never learned it, the headline is a line from Psalm 110; it says, "Thou art a priest forever."

Thanks for a plug

We at the Friends Committee on National Legislation were pleasantly surprised to see the favorable mention of our *FCNL Washington Newsletter* in your pages ["In the Know," June 4]. As your review noted, the newsletter tries to promote clear and open discussion on such issues as economic and social justice, arms control and disarmament, and efforts to reduce military spending. Let me add that anyone interested can request three free issues by visiting our web site www.fcnl.org , by e-mail at fcnl@fcnl.org., by phone at (202) 547-6000, or by mail at 245 Second Street, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002-5795.

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ACTUALLY, THE LAST WORD HASN'T BEEN SAID. YET

James O'Gara

I can't say exactly when I started to read *Commonweal*, but I was probably in my early twenties. The magazine was one of several Catholic publications we received at the Catholic Worker in Chicago at the time, in the days before I left to serve in the army in World War II. I wonder if most present-day readers are aware that in those days before Vatican II, being a "*Commonweal* Catholic" had a very different feel than it has since the council brought some of the ideas commonly discussed in *Commonweal*'s pages into the mainstream of Catholic thinking.

In those bad old days, the magazine was forbidden reading in some of the major seminaries of the country. The editors always published material if they thought it worthwhile, even if it tended to be a bit dull or heavy reading. After I was on the staff, I learned a joke which we told on ourselves. The story went that one day a seminarian going to confession told his confessor that he had read the *Commonweal*. The confessor said, "It isn't necessarily a sin to read the *Commonweal*." To which the young man replied, "But Father, I took pleasure in it."

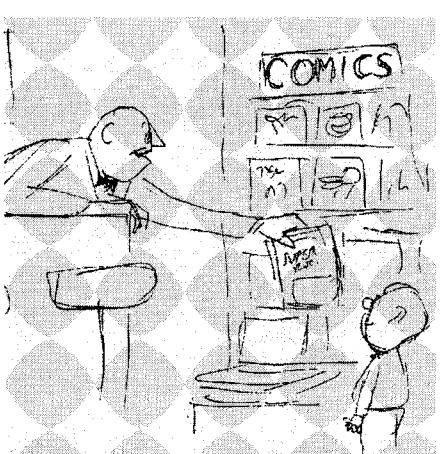
Even in those days before Vatican II, I would have thought that the fairly regular appearance in our pages of members of the hierarchy like Bishop (later Cardinal) John Wright and others would have indicated our orthodoxy. In addition, the magazine regularly printed distinguished if sometimes controversial theologians. Being on what was in those days considered the frontier brought us denunciations in diocesan papers and from pulpits—even in some cases from the pulpits of our own parish churches. That made efforts to build circulation and stay afloat even more difficult.

I also wonder if current-day readers realize that *Commonweal* was not always a nonprofit corporation. This is not to say that we ever made a profit. What I am saying is that the magazine was originally set up as a normal corporation, not as a legally nonprofit operation able to receive tax-free gifts, as it is now.

This became quite an issue for us editors during the McCarthy era. The stock in the corporation at that time was divided among three owners: Edward Skillin, Philip Burnham, and Mrs. George Craig, Jr. During the 1950s, Burnham became more and more conservative, and at one point this created quite a problem for the editors. We increasingly received hints that we should ease up in our criticism of Senator Joseph McCarthy.

When the hints became somewhat more than hints, we younger editors talked it over. I was delegated to go to the stockholders' meeting and inform them that if there was any more pressure to change the editorial position on Joe McCarthy, we would all resign in a body and then call in representatives of the *New York Times* and other publications to tell them why we were resigning.

I conveyed these feelings to the stockholders and they seemed to have decided to ease up the pressure on us. But we were later halfway forced to run a regular column by Burnham, which was increasingly both right-wing and dull.



"The critics went wild over this one."

This stock division and possible pressure on the editors was not a happy situation. I finally persuaded Ed Skillin to buy out the other stockholders so that he had a majority of stock for voting purposes. This meant that we were protected from stockholder pressure on our editorial positions, pressure being brought by Burnham primarily. Years later, thanks to the efforts of a friend of a friend who served as our *pro bono* lawyer in the matter, the magazine was able to become officially a nonprofit corporation, eliminating private stockholders who could bring pressure on the editors.

Looking back on that now, bear in mind the considerable tension of that period on the McCarthy issue, and the near hysteria on the subject in some quarters. Our circulation was even lower than it is now, unfortunately. It is hard to guess what would have happened to the magazine if we had resigned in a body and it had become something of a scandal in national Catholic journalistic circles.

This fragment of memory is scheduled, I know, for the department called "The Last Word." Thinking back over those times, I am inclined to think that had Philip Burnham been able to force us into mass resignation, with all the publicity that would have followed, the magazine might not have survived. Since our circulation was low and our financial resources were even slimmer than they are now, it seems to me very possible that that event might even have been the magazine's "last word."

As it turned out, *Commonweal* weathered that storm, as it has all others, and it went on to publish many, many more words since then. May it have years and years to continue in that work. Happy anniversary, *Commonweal*! □

James O'Gara *served as* Commonweal's *managing editor (1952–67) and editor (1967–84).*

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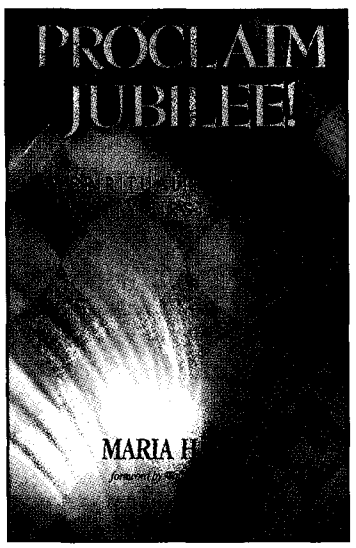

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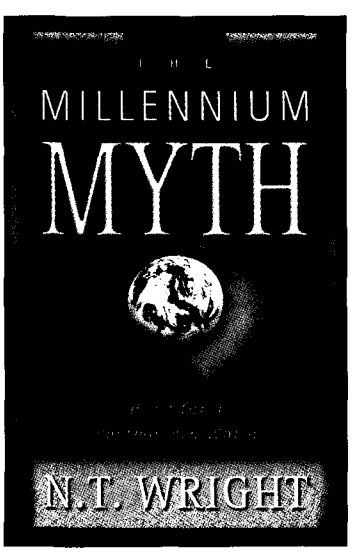

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